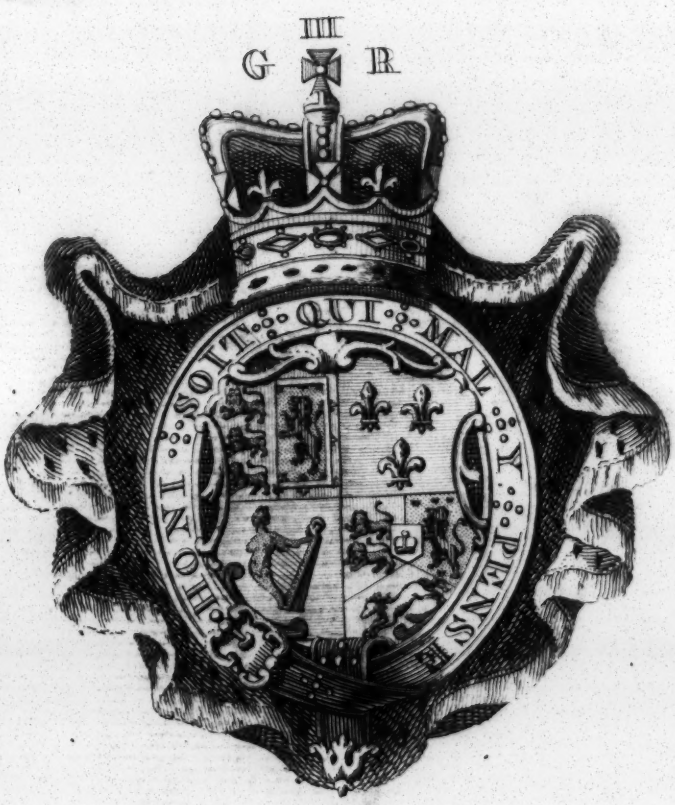
INDIFFERENCE
FOR
RELIGION
INEXCUSABLE;
OR, A
Serious, impartial and practical Review
OF THE
Certainty, Importance, and Harmony of Religion both Natural and Revealed.

" Let us reaſon cautiouſly, pronounce modeſtly, practiſe " ſincerely, and hope humbly. To do this is to be " wiſe and good; and to be wiſe and good is better far " than to be a philoſopher, a metaphyſician, or even " a divine." BOLINGBROKE's Works, vol. 3. p. 384.

By SAMUEL SQUIRE, D.D.
Clerk of the Cloſet to his Royal Highneſs the Prince of WALES.

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III
G R
HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE

TO HIS

ROYAL HIGHNESS

GEORGE

Prince of WALES.

SIR,

ENcouraged by the dignity and importance of my ſubject, I have preſumed, with the moſt reſpectful

 humility,

humility, to beg the honour of Your ROYAL HIGHNESS's acceptance, and patronage, of the following ſheets. They are intended to vindicate the evidence, to aſſert the reaſonableneſs, to point out the advantages, to explain the doctrines, to ſhew the connexion, and to recommend and enforce the uniform practice of religion both natural and revealed; and therefore will not be thought unworthy the protection of a Prince, deſtined by his illuſtrious birth to defend the common faith,

and

and by his diſtinguiſhed virtues to adorn it. The exemplary devotion with which Your ROYAL HIGHNESS attends the public worſhip of Your GOD, the eminent regularity of Your life and converſation amidſt the fire of youth, and the diffuſive charity which animates all Your actions, ſhew that Your ROYAL HIGHNESS has choſen that better part, which will moſt effectually promote (what will be always neareſt to Your heart) the ſolid and eſſential intereſts of Your country. For there is not a more

infallible maxim in the whole ſcience of government, than that religion is the great ſtrength and ſupport of the civil adminiſtration, introducing and encouraging the obſervation of every virtue, which can advance and ſecure the real proſperity of a nation. What laſting happineſs may not GREAT BRITAIN promiſe to herſelf, under the auſpicious influence of a Prince free from bigotry and ſuperſtition, and unaffectedly zealous for the benevolent doctrines of chriſtianity!

May

May the bleſſings of that Wiſdom, in whoſe right hand is length of days, and in her left riches and honour, ever attend Your ROYAL HIGHNESS, to guide and conduct You in all Your ſteps!

I am,

SIR,

Your ROYAL HIGHNESS's

moſt humble,

moſt dutiful,

and moſt faithful ſervant,

Samuel Squire.

PREFACE.

TO lay before the attentive and well-diſpoſed reader a plain, diſtinct and connected review of the chief principles of religion both natural and revealed; to deſcribe the evidence upon which they are founded; to point out the eſſential laws of moral action; and to furniſh the ſtrongeſt motives to live agreeably to thoſe laws, is the intention of the following pages. They are deſigned as a remedy

medy againſt that indifference, with regard to God and his worſhip, which is, every day, making ſuch a mighty progreſs amongſt us, by evincing, that the great doctrines and duties of religion are inſeparably connected with the exiſtence of the divine Being, the uncorrupted dictates of right reaſon, our own trueſt happineſs, and the laſting intereſts of ſociety.

In purſuance of this plan, I have all along treated the various articles of my important ſubject in the plaineſt, eaſieſt and moſt practical manner, wiſhing, at the ſame time, both to touch the heart, and to convince the underſtanding; I have endeavoured to keep as free as I poſſibly could from

from the perplexities of the controverſial ſtile, and to conduct my reader from the proof of one propoſition to another, without ever ſuffering his attention to be interrupted either by abſtruſe ſpeculations in metaphyſicks, or by literary diſquiſitions, or by uncharitable cenſures upon other perſons miſtakes.

But more eſpecially have I ſtudiouſly avoided entering upon any of thoſe intricate and thorny ſubjects of diſputation, which divide Chriſtians amongſt themſelves: ſuch diſcuſſions being entirely uſeleſs, either to awaken the conſciences of thoſe, who are indifferent to all religion; or to remove the prejudices of ſuch, as really doubt of the celeſtial origin

of

of that ſyſtem of faith and duty, which we profeſs. *

The moſt material objections which have been hitherto urged againſt religion, though not drawn out into mode and figure, the competent reader will find either obviated or refuted in the very manner of examining, ſtating and proving the ſeveral points, as they come before

* *Fabricii præf. ad delect. argument. & ſyllab. ſcriptor. qui veritatem relig. chriſtian. contra atheos, &c. aſſeruerunt* —— " Itaque nolis mirari, " quod non hic occurrent tibi adeo multa de " S. S. Trinitate, de perſona & naturis Θεανθρώ- " πȣ Chriſti, de ejus ſatisfactione & de ſacra- " mentis. Nam licet hæc quoque negantur vel " oppugnantur ab iis qui Chriſtiani non ſunt, ta- " men etiam ſimul ac Chriſto manus dant, eum- " que tanquam Salvatorem ac Doctorem ſuum " recipiunt, pariter neceſſe eſt pro veris & divi- " nis hæc ab illis agnoſci, niſi quatenus inter " ipſos Chriſtianos de genuinis horum rationibus " adhuc diſceptatur, quas controverſias excutere " . . . . alterius conſilii operiſque fuerit."

him

him—And though it be impoſſible, in the preſent dawn of knowledge, wholly to remove every difficulty, which may be ſtarted by ſubtle and ingenious men concerning the Deity and his attributes, the foundation of moral obligation, the certainty of a divine revelation, and its preciſe meaning in ſome particular inſtances; yet, if the evidence for the truth of any propoſition be clear, and the beſt which the nature of the ſubject will admit of, the rational and candid enquirer will acquieſce in the high degree of probability, and act conformably to it, without perplexing himſelf farther with ſuch deep and curious reſearches, as will avail him nothing in his progreſs towards intellectual and religious perfection.

As

As I have not been ſollicitous to avoid the arguments of other authors, who have treated of the reaſonableneſs and neceſſity of Religion in general, and of Chriſtianity in particular: ſo neither have I ſcrupled, in ſome few inſtances, to borrow even their expreſſions, where they appeared to convey my meaning with more preciſion, fullneſs and ſtrength, than my own had done. Nor ſhould I have made the leaſt heſitation of marking the paſſages, thus tranſcribed, in the uſual manner, and of referring to the volumes, from whence they were ſelected; had I not been apprehenſive that by ſo doing my readers, as it often happens, might have been induced to pay more regard to the ſenti-

ments

ments and authority of a great name, than to the weight of the proofs themſelves, and the force of evidence.

Not having ſo many opportunities, at preſent, of addreſſing myſelf to my pariſhioners from the pulpit, as I had before I had the honour to be appointed clerk of the cloſet to his Royal Highneſs the Prince of Wales; if this work may be of the leaſt ſpiritual advantage to the worthy inhabitants of St. Annes and Greenwich, (to whoſe ſervice and inſtruction it is more peculiarly devoted) or, indeed, if it may be ſerviceable to any other well-diſpoſed perſons, either by informing them of what may not hitherto have ſufficient-

ly

ly engaged their attention, or by recalling things to their memory, which have been too lightly baniſhed thence by the cares and pleaſures of the world, I ſhall not think my labour in compoſing it ill beſtowed. For to be uſeful to my fellow-creatures, to the beſt of my power, by advancing the eſſential intereſts of true virtue and pure religion, is my ſincere deſire, my earneſt prayer, and my utmoſt ambition.

Greenwich, Oct. 7.
1757.

INDIFFERENCE FOR RELIGION INEXCUSABLE.

I. IT is impoſſible for a conſidering man, who ſeriouſly attends to what is paſſing in the world, not to perceive, that an indolent neglect of the moſt important intereſts of morality is amongſt the increaſing evils of the pre-

ſent times; that a careleſs indifference, with reſpect to the duties owing to the Divine Being, is become a mark of politeneſs, and eſteemed the reſult of a ſuperiour underſtanding; that there are too many amongſt us, who ſeem to be wholly regardleſs, whether there be any truth in religion, or not; whether its high pretenſions are well, or ill-founded; whether they have right, or wrong, or any notions at all upon the important ſubject; or, whether any thing be required of them either to do, or to forbear, in conſequence of the religious principles, which they may chance to profeſs. As they often call themſelves Chriſtians, without believing the doctrines of him, by whoſe name they are diſtinguiſhed; ſo is it too cuſtomary to believe without examination and conviction, and to be convinced without practiſing. Surely, therefore, in ſuch a ſituation of things, it cannot be looked upon either as an uſeleſs, or unneceſſary undertaking to inform mankind, from time

time to time, of their eſſential duties; frequently to remind them, that they are rational as well as ſenſible creatures, that they have ſouls, as well as bodies, whoſe gratifications are to be conſulted, and whoſe intereſt is to be provided for; continually to be calling off their affections from the momentary pleaſures of animal nature to the purſuit of their greateſt and moſt laſting good; to direct their matureſt thoughts to the immoveable relations, which they ſtand in to their God, and to the inſeparable connection by which they are united to their fellow-creatures; and, repeatedly, to ſet before them the evidence, the utility, and the harmony of religion both natural and revealed.

II. Nor have we any juſt grounds to be apprehenſive, that by thus offering religion to the touchſtone of argument and enquiry, its foundations may, in the event, be ſapped and overturned, and the moſt ſacred inſtitutions taught to ſit too light and eaſy upon our minds. On

the contrary, we may be fully aſſured, that where the trial is ſincere, where it is guided by a judgement impartial, diſcerning and well-informed, what is right, and juſt, and good, will thereby become manifeſt, and be more ſecurely eſtabliſhed; whilſt what is weak, and falſe, and wicked, will be detected and exploded. By this means every various degree of evidence, from certainty to the leaſt appearance of probability, will have its proportionable weight and influence upon our minds, and be made the rule and ſtandard both of our knowledge, our belief, and our practice. By this means alſo, authority will be ſet upon its proper baſis, and religion become, what it always ought to be, a free and reaſonable ſervice, a ſervice worthy the Being to whom it is directed, and of man by whom it is performed.

A divine revelation, it is true, ſhould ſuch at any time be graciouſly vouchſafed by God to his creatures, cannot deceive us, and therefore muſt always be

be abſolutely and implicitly confided in and obeyed; but it will, undoubtedly, be required of us, before we venture to build any thing upon this revelation and to draw concluſions from it, to be aſſured, that it is really derived from the Father of light and truth. For to admit a revelation as coming from Heaven, to believe in it and to be led by it, without previous examination or proof, is ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm, is nothing elſe but mere fanaticiſm. To argue, therefore, for a blind, paſſive, and un-enquiring faith and obedience, in any caſe whatſoever, is to love darkneſs rather than ſunſhine; is to open a wide door for all manner of error and deluſion to enter in at; and highly to diſcredit the cauſe itſelf, in whoſe favour ſo abſurd a plea is offered. For we ſhall always ſuſpect, and not without reaſon, that ſomething weak, or wrong, or unjuſtifiable, is concealed under that which we are told muſt not be ſearched or narrowly looked into. It is

a principle of the moſt pernicious conſequence, as it has a direct tendency to confound the true religion with all ſorts of impoſture; and will equally ſuit with all doctrines and opinions, even the moſt extravagant and contradictory. The heathen prieſt will ſtrongly, and ſucceſsfully recommend it to us in defence of eſtabliſhed idolatry: the Turk, upon this foundation, may ſafely believe his Koran; and the Jew perſiſt in the obſervation of the antiquated religion of his forefathers. Thoſe doctrines, which are founded in right reaſon, agreeable to the will of God, and, in fact, derived from him as their immediate ſource and original, cannot be overthrown; and, therefore, need not fear what either the force, or cunning, or malice of man can do unto them. Truth never dreads being ſhewn in the fulleſt blaze of light; it will ſtand the ſtricteſt and moſt ſevere ſcrutiny, and is ſtill growing brighter and brighter by being oppoſed, canvaſſed and examined into. It

is an honeſt, impartial, and unprejudiced freedom of thinking and diſcourſing upon all ſubjects whatever, conducted with humility, decency and information, which ought to diſtinguiſh the religion of a Chriſtian from that of all the world beſides; it is what really does diſtinguiſh the well-inſtructed faith of a Proteſtant, from the bigotted and ſuperſtitious zeal of the Roman Catholick.

Nor ſhall we find the enquiry into the truth, reaſonableneſs and neceſſity of religion, ſo perplexing and difficult a taſk, as the want of accuſtoming ourſelves to reflection, as the love of pleaſure, and diſlike of ſtudious attention, may, perhaps, perſuade us to imagine; or as the immenſe variety of diſputes, which have been raiſed upon this moſt intereſting of all ſubjects, may induce us to believe. Much logick, an extenſive literature, and a deep ſkill in metaphyſicks, are not ſo neceſſary to enable us to judge truly of what is right and wrong in religious matters, as an humble,

candid, and ingenuous diſpoſition; as an earneſt deſire to know our duty, in order more fully and exactly to practiſe it: it is the modeſt, and not the preſumptuous enquirer, who makes a real and ſafe progreſs in the diſcovery of divine truth.

III. Is THERE, THEN, A GOD? Is there an eternal, all-powerful, all-wiſe and all-perfect Being, by the efficacy of whoſe will all things were at firſt created, and upon whom the whole univerſe is continually dependant, as upon its Preſerver and Governour? Until this moſt fundamental point of faith be ſettled to our entire ſatisfaction, our minds will be perpetually fluctuating in doubt and uncertainty; our religious hopes and fears will be all vain and irrational; and our notions of morality vague, empty, and uninfluencing. Behold, then, the never-ceaſing order, beauty, and regularity of that wondrous conſtitution of things, which every where ſurrounds us, and captivates our admiration! So much

power,

power, art, contrivance and deſign appear in every diſtinct part of the various ſyſtem of nature, when conſidered by itſelf; and ſuch exquiſite proportion, harmony, and mutual connection ſhine throughout the whole viſible world, when the ſeveral parts are compared together, and referred to each other—that, whether we turn our admiring eyes inward, and contemplate our own ſtructure and compoſition; or ſurvey the infinity of objects, both animate and inanimate, which are, every inſtant, preſenting themſelves to our contemplation; we ſhall find it impoſſible ſeriouſly to doubt, for a ſingle moment, of the exiſtence of an eternal, all-powerful, and all-wiſe Being, the efficient cauſe of all things. The heavens and the earth, each in its place, proclaim this great and leading truth to mankind with ſuch ſtrength of demonſtration; that he who, really, does not hear their united voice, who is not perſuaded, who is not entirely convinced by it, may be

ſecurely

ſecurely pronounced to have loſt the true uſe of his faculties, to be deaf, ſenſeleſs, and void of underſtanding. To behold the ſtupendous machine of the univerſe with attention, to reflect upon its creation at firſt, and its continued preſervation for ſo many ages ſince; and yet to believe, that there is no Being diſtinct from the machine itſelf, who originally planned and finiſhed, and who ſtill ſupports it, no energy nor intelligence but what was formed in it, and grew out of it, a man muſt be credulous beyond all computation and conception of credulity.

IV. Did that ſun, for inſtance, whoſe uniform and well-ordered light and heat are ſo eſſentially neceſſary to the preſervation of this globe, and of the various ſpecies of living creatures, which have their dwellings in it, call himſelf into being? Did thoſe trees and herbs, whoſe beauty we ſo juſtly admire, and without which life could not be ſupported, ſhoot out of the ſoil ſpontaneouſly,

ouſly, according to their ſeveral kinds, and cover the naked mold without any previous planting or ſowing? Did that immenſe and permanent variety of animals, which people and adorn this earth without over-charging it, originally make themſelves? Or did they all owe their exiſtence to other beings like themſelves, weak, paſſive, periſhing and dependant? The very ſuppoſition is, to the higheſt degree, ridiculous and abſurd. — Was, then, this well-proportioned and ſelf-agreeing ſyſtem of ſun, moon and ſtars; of animal and vegetable; of intellectual, ſenſible, and unfeeling; of air, water, and mineral, formed by *hazard*, and the blind unguided force of matter? Or was it produced into exiſtence by the indeterminate and uncertain action of an *unmeaning nature*, and a *blind fatality*? Or, did it exiſt for ever (in the manner we ſee it at preſent) without a beginning, in a *perpetual ſeries, order and ſucceſſion*? But if it muſt be looked upon as abſurd,

and,

and, to an extreme degree, irrational to ſuppoſe, that hazard, nature, fate, or any other unintelligent and neceſſarily-acting cauſe whatever, may, at preſent, form ſo various, ſo intricate, ſo comprehenſive and perfect a machine as the human body; or build and preſerve a world, ſo exquiſitely finiſhed, as that in which we are placed; it muſt have been always equally abſurd to have made the ſuppoſition, to whatever diſtant period of duration, to whatever whimſical juveneſcence of matter, we may ſtrive to carry backwards our extravagant imaginations. For the mere circumſtance of time cannot poſſibly make any difference in the caſe before us; nor can thouſands and ten thouſands of ages give activity, conſiſtency and underſtanding to a cauſe, of whoſe eſſence it is to be unactive, irregular and unintelligent; or make thoſe ſucceſſions of beings, taken all together, to be independant, underived, and ſelf-exiſtent, each of which, conſidered

ſidered ſingly, muſt be acknowledged to be wholly dependant upon, and derived from, the preceding. We know that there is a neceſſary and immutable relation between every cauſe and its effect; and that the general properties of the former may always be collected and known by carefully examining the appearances of the latter. As therefore confuſion, deformity, continual change and monſtrous variety are the natural and never-failing effects, where chance, blindneſs, and unperceiving neceſſity are the predominant principles: ſo are regularity, order, beauty, uniformity, and perſeverance, the genuine and univerſally-acknowledged offspring of power guided by wiſdom, counſil and deſign.

V. The man, whoſe power of imagination will permit him to conceive, that the moſt excellent pieces of human art, ſkill, and induſtry; the moſt magnificent palaces, for example, the moſt exquiſite hiſtorical pictures, and the moſt

uſeful and complicated machines, might have been built, painted, and conſtructed without any previous plan, contrivance, or foreſight: the man whoſe wild and extravagant fancy will ſuffer him ſeriouſly to ſuppoſe, that the celebrated labours of a Homer, a Shakeſpear, or a Milton, might have been compoſed by throwing together at random, as fate or hazard directed, the different elements of the alphabet — ſuch an one, indeed, could he be found, might ſtill go on to fancy (for *believe* I am ſure he could not) that this moſt beautiful ſtructure of the human body (not to mention the other parts of the viſible world) might have been framed by chance; that rationality, judgement, and free-will, might have been ground or pounded out of the infinitely ſmall, round, and ſmooth particles which compoſe the general maſs of matter; and that life, ſenſe, ſelf-motion, memory, reflection, abſtraction, and all the other wonderful faculties of

the

the ſoul, might have had no other ſource, cauſe, or original, than the fortuitous concourſe, colliſion, and concretion of inanimate atoms.

But abſurdities beget abſurdities, whilſt we are viewing the arguments of atheiſm, and one impoſſibility grows out of another. If fate, or hazard, or nature, or an innate energy inſeparably reſiding in the univerſal matter (call it by what name you will) after an infinity of changes of form and place, did, at length, produce that immenſe variety of animals, which float in the ſummer-air, and which cover the ſurface of the earth, all of them completely furniſhed, as we ſee they are, with the parts neceſſary both to preſerve their own exiſtence, and to continue their ſeveral kinds; may it not reaſonably be demanded, how it comes to paſs, that this plaſtick efficacy having attained the exacteſt, and moſt artful ſymmetry and ſtructure for her ſeveral creatures, and lodged them

in

in places moſt convenient to nouriſh them, has ever ſince deſiſted from her arduous labour? How it comes to paſs, that animals are not ſtill produced, in the original way, by fermentation and putrefaction, and yet that their ſeveral ſpecies are regularly continued without addition or diminution? Why does not this plaſtick nature ſtill go on to make men without hands, feet, or heads, as ſhe muſt be ſuppoſed to have done, in the infinite diverſity of her firſt terreſtrial productions, before ſhe arrived at the ſtate of perfection, in which we ſee her works appear at preſent? What was there of motion, moiſture and fertility in the earth formerly, with which it is not now endued? Or will you ſuppoſe that this plaſtick energy, knowing that it is impoſſible for her to add any thing to the perfection of her ſeveral creatures, has therefore prudently given over making any more experiments? But is not this to allot wiſdom and deſign to a cauſe, of whoſe eſ-

ſence

ſence it is to be, and to act, without wiſdom and deſign?

VI. But let it be granted, for arguments ſake, that this ideal nature, after an infinity of tryals, might, by we know not what caſual coincidence, commixture and cooperation of cauſes and effects, produce one man, and one of each tribe of animals! But is it poſſible even for the moſt extravagant imagination of the moſt extravagant viſionary to conceive, that ſhe ſhould be able to produce two of each ſpecies? and that of theſe two, one of them ſhould be a male and the other a female? and that they ſhould come into being juſt at the ſame time, and at the ſame place? and that that place ſhould be previouſly furniſhed with all the conveniencies of proper warmth, food and water, ſo neceſſary both to ſupply the wants of creatures, who had nothing elſe but the mere ſenſe of feeling for their direction, and to ſcreen them likewiſe from that nu-

merous train of accidents, which attend animal life in its infancy? In ſpight therefore of all which either reaſon or fancy can invent to the contrary; let every vain imagination of ſcepticiſm be indulged with the moſt favourable examination; let every prejudice of education and cuſtom be entirely thrown away: yet ſtill ſhall we find ourſelves under a moral incapacity of baniſhing from our minds the notion of a ſelf-exiſtent, all-powerful, and all-wiſe Being, the Creator and Father of all things. We cannot even open our attentive eyes, for a moment, but the idea of a God will immediately ruſh in and force itſelf upon us, and we ſhall feel ourſelves under an utter incapacity of ſeriouſly doubting of his exiſtence. All obſervation, all knowledge, all ſcience leads us to own this fundamental truth; and the univerſal reception, which it has met with from all ſorts of thinking people, in all ages of the world and in all places, manifeſtly evinces,

that

that it is entirely ſuitable, proportionate and agreeable to the general conception and reaſon of mankind.

VII. Here, then, let us humbly preſume more nearly to approach, and with more accuracy to ſurvey, this univerſal Source of being; let us go on to enquire into the whole of his perfections, as they appear relatively to this ſyſtem, and endeavour, with all becoming modeſty and reverence, to contemplate him in his eſſential attributes.---Imagine not that we are here propoſing to ſearch into the *manner of God's being*, which it would be unpardonable arrogance in us to attempt to explain, becauſe it is impoſſible that we ſhould be able to form any conception of it: or that we are curious to inveſtigate either the *manner of that knowledge*, by which paſt, preſent and future are alike intuitively perceived both in their cauſes and effects, or the *manner of that power*, to which to will and to be done are the ſame.—But as ſenſible rational creatures,

in a perpetual purſuit of every thing which may tend to perfect our natures, and to advance our trueſt happineſs, we may be, and, moſt undoubtedly, we are extremely intereſted to enquire into the attributes of the Deity, as far as they may have any relation to ourſelves, and to the ſyſtem wherein we are placed; and for ſuch an enquiry we certainly have all the faculties neceſſary to direct our reſearches; nor will our labour be in vain, if we proceed with proper attention, caution and perſeverance. If the being of God cannot poſſibly be a matter of mere indifference to his creatures, ſurely it moſt nearly concerns them to endeavour by ſearching to find out, and to know, who and what their God is. Are we, then, to look upon the God of nature, upon the author of this world, merely as an eternal, and all-powerful intelligence, cloathed indeed with majeſty, dwelling in light inacceſſible, and ſupremely happy in an indolent tranquillity,

but,

but, at the ſame time, utterly regardleſs of what paſſes amongſt his humble creatures, unconnected with mankind, uncommunicative and unbenevolent? or is the Lord of the univerſe to be dreaded by us, as an arbitrary being, governed only by the impetuous ſallies of an unreſtrained will, partial, auſtere, rigid, and wholly unconcerned at the miſeries which he ſees befall mankind? Conſult the volumes of the creation, as they lie open before us, the beſt, the ſureſt and the only guides, by which we can hope to arrive at the knowledge of Gods perfections and of the nature of his connection with mankind, and we ſhall ſoon be demonſtratively convinced, that the almighty God, who in the beginning made the heavens and the earth, ſtill continueth to rule in the kingdoms of men; that he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works; and that eſſential goodneſs, and eſſential juſtice are ever tempering, mitigating, and directing the

mightineſs of his irreſiſtible power, and the deſigns of his infinite wiſdom. But theſe are points, which call for a more mature diſcuſſion.

VIII. If, then, we may be allowed to argue, as certainly we may, that there muſt have been *ſomething from all eternity*, becauſe there is *ſomething now*: and that this *eternal ſomething* muſt have been everlaſtingly *intelligent*, becauſe there is *intelligence now*: ſurely the ſame manner of reaſoning may, with equal force and propriety, be applied to demonſtrate, that the *eternal Being* muſt likewiſe be *good and juſt*. For that theſe qualities of goodneſs and juſtice, as they exiſt in free-reaſonable beings, are perfections, and that theſe perfections, in a certain degree, are at preſent in mankind, we cannot but ſee and acknowledge. Either, therefore, they were eternally in the Creator, and from him communicated to the creatures: or we muſt maintain, that the creatures are more perfect than the Creator; that

non-entity may produce entity; non-intelligence intelligence, and non-goodneſs goodneſs. But as this argument to prove the goodneſs of God may perhaps appear too general, and too abſtracted for the comprehenſion of perſons unaccuſtomed to metaphyſical ſpeculations: let us, in the next place, ſeriouſly conſult our own feelings, and the unbiaſſed judgement, which our conſcience makes, of our preſent condition and circumſtances in the world; let us have recourſe to the works of the creation, wherein the original will, deſign and intention of the Deity towards his creatures is fully contained, and we ſhall not long be at a loſs for ample evidence to determine the intereſting queſtion before us.

IX. *Goodneſs* may be defined to be an uniform inclination and diſpoſition of the mind to communicate pleaſure and happineſs to all beings capable of enjoying them; a diſpoſition, however, neither moved by neceſſity, nor acting blindly

without diſcernment, but regulated in all its operations by the dictates of right reaſon. And can it be denied, do we not, in fact, feel and experience, that there is much pleaſure and happineſs diſtributed and diffuſed throughout this whole ſyſtem, eſpecially among the children of men? We are placed in a ſituation perfectly well fitted, and entirely agreeable to our natures; and are completely furniſhed with all the abilities both of body and mind, neceſſary to ſecure our being, and to provide for our well-being. We love life, we are fond of exiſtence, and extremely unwilling to part with it. But would this be the caſe, was the general amount of human miſery larger than the ſum of human happineſs? would this be the caſe, were the phyſical and moral evils, to which we are expoſed, greater than the good of both kinds, which, unaſked and unmerited, God has ſo freely beſtowed upon us? For us alſo, and for our

ſakes,

ſakes, the ſun riſes, the rains deſcend in their appointed ſeaſons, and the earth brings forth her fruits abundantly: all nature ſeems, in a ſort, to be ſubſervient to our eaſe, convenience and comfort, and to have been purpoſely made, that it might contribute to our pleaſure and happineſs. Let not the reader haſtily imagine, that I am here giving to man a larger ſhare of importance in the ſcale of being, than he really has; or that, proud of the dignity of the human ſpecies, I am endeavouring to perſuade him to believe, that every thing was created for our *ſole* uſe and benefit. For there may be, and moſt probably are, a multitude of other wiſe and beneficent purpoſes intended to be ſerved by theſe things, which we neither do, nor can, know any thing of. But as we are, at preſent, enquiring, whether God be a good being, that is, whether he has a diſpoſition to communicate happineſs to his creatures; the queſtion, with reference to this ſyſtem at leaſt, muſt be,

be, in a great meaſure, decided, as this ſyſtem ſtands particularly related to ourſelves, who make ſo conſiderable a part of it. For as we are conſcious only of our own feelings, of our own pleaſures and pains, it is from them only that we can ſecurely argue in the preſent caſe. And, therefore, when we evidently perceive, that almoſt every thing in this ſyſtem either actually does, or, by the intervention of our ſkill, may be made, ſome way or other, to contribute to our convenient, comfortable and ornamental ſubſiſtence, we may, and we muſt, conclude, if we reaſon conſiſtently, that this was, at leaſt, one principal end, for which the wiſdom and power of God originally intended theſe things, and, conſequently, that, with reſpect to us, he is a good being.

X. With the like gracious view, intention, and diſpoſition in the divine being to communicate happineſs to us, whatever tends to promote our preſervation is ſo made and conſtituted by him, as to give us

pleaſure

pleaſure in its uſe: whilſt things pernicious and deſtructive to our well-being are framed in ſuch a manner, as to excite uneaſineſs and diſorder in us. And as things agreeable in their nature, and even ſalutary to us, when immoderately uſed, become prejudicial to our welfare, in order to prevent this abuſe, pain is generally annexed to ſuch immoderate uſe.—But could this be done without deſign; and does not ſuch a deſign plainly argue an uniform principle of benevolence in the mind of the deſigner? —So again; being made capable of contributing greatly either to the happineſs, or to the miſery of our fellow-creatures by our behaviour towards them, in order to encourage us to prefer the former, we find pleaſure naturally annexed to a conſciouſneſs of willing their happineſs, and pain to a conſciouſneſs of intending their miſery. No man makes another happy, but he ſecretly applauds himſelf for ſo doing, nor voluntarily renders his fellow-creatures miſerable, without ſilently condemning his

own

own conduct. No man, designedly, puts another to pain, but to satisfy some favourite passion, or craving appetite, which, he imagined, could not otherwise be satisfied; nor does he ever escape remorse and anguish, when the gratification, which excited the act of severity, ceases. Nay we cannot even see the miserable without perceiving a disagreeable sensation in ourselves, not to be removed, but by endeavouring to ease, relieve and assist them, unless some particular displeasure has been conceived against the sufferers, on account of injuries supposed to be done either to ourselves, or others. * —In short, such is the benevolent constitution of the human system, that no man can procure his own greatest happiness (to which, however, he is irresistibly determined) but by contributing to the common good; but by attending to, and promoting, all that lies in his power, the general happiness. If, then, these inclinations, propensities, and instincts (call them

* See an *Enquiry into the evidence of the christian religion*, by Mrs. Newcome.

them by what name you pleaſe) were originally implanted in us, or were made the natural reſult of the conſtitution given to us by the wiſe Author of our exiſtence, they muſt be looked upon as ſo many inconteſtible proofs, that he willed, propoſed, and intended the univerſal happineſs; that he has diſpoſed us by our very frame and texture for a perpetual circulation of friendly offices, and formed us in ſuch a manner, as to be ever willing, ready and pleaſed to aſſiſt, relieve, comfort, and make each other happy. But ſhall man be benevolent, and ſhall the Author of man be ſuppoſed deſtitute of this amiable principle, without which it is impoſſible to conceive a perfect character? As truly may we ſay, that he who made the eye does not himſelf ſee; and that he who formed the human underſtanding has himſelf no knowledge.

XI. But why is there, then, all that miſery and wretchedneſs in the world, which we every day ſee, feel, and hear ſo bitterly

bitterly complained of? From whence ariſes this variety of woe, and how is it to be reconciled with the genuine fruits of this attribute? If God be good, why are we not all completely happy? and what can prevent a Being whoſe wiſdom is infinite, whoſe power nothing can reſiſt, and to whom to will and to do is the ſame thing, from executing, to the utmoſt extent, his kind intentions towards his rational creatures? God has, certainly, performed the whole of his gracious intentions towards mankind; but we muſt conclude from his works, that his intentions were, not to communicate to them an abſolute, unlimited and unreſtricted happineſs, but a conditional happineſs only; a mixed, reſtrained and progreſſive happineſs; a happineſs conſiſtent with moral agency, and his own righteous government of the univerſe. For, if he had intended the former, he would neither have created them *material*, nor permitted them the uſe of *free-will*: diſeaſes, pains

and

and death being the unavoidable conſequence of the *material* compoſition of our bodies, as moral evil, and the whole train of miſchiefs reſulting from thence, are inſeparably connected with the abuſe of free-will—and yet, had we not been made *material*, we never could have exiſted as *men*; as without a power of doing wrong as well as right there could have been no better nor worſe in human actions, there could have been no moral diſtinction between man and man; nor could there have been any ſuch thing as rational happineſs, or that exquiſite enjoyment, which ariſes from the conſciouſneſs of having behaved ourſelves ſuitably to our nature and to the will of our Creator. The ſupreme Being having once determined to create *man*, we may, I think, humbly preſume to aſſert, that it was not within the power of Omnipotence itſelf, without a continual change or ſuſpenſion of the laws of nature, entirely to prevent the origin either of natural, or moral evil.

Why,

Why, indeed, the divine Being was pleaſed to create us *men*, and to give us only a conditional and precarious happineſs, inſtead of placing us in a ſituation, which would immediately and infallibly have conducted us to the poſſeſſion of our chief good, we cannot be informed in our preſent ſtate of being, nor are we greatly concerned to know. The proper buſineſs of mankind is to endeavour to find out what they, in fact, are, and how they are to behave in conſequence of what they are, and not to amuſe themſelves, in vain, with enquiring, what they might have been had it pleaſed God.

XII. If the Author of this ſyſtem has completely furniſhed it with all the means neceſſary to make his rational creatures happy upon the whole, and has moreover ſupplied them with all the requiſite powers both of body and mind to enable them to know and make uſe of theſe means, what can they reaſonably demand more? They certainly have no ſufficient cauſe to mur-

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mur and repine at their ſituation; to accuſe their Creator of want of goodneſs to them, and to complain, that they are not made ſo perfect as, they imagine, they might have been. That they are frequently miſerable, as indeed they are, that pain and grief are ſo frequently the bitter lot of their inheritance upon earth, is it not becauſe they have acted irrationally, and againſt the dictates of their conſcience and better judgement? is it not becauſe they have freely indulged their craving paſſions, and implicitly followed their wrong notions of pleaſure? is it not becauſe they have voluntarily, and preſumptuouſly turned out of the way, which they knew to be the neareſt and the moſt direct road to conduct them to their trueſt happineſs? Upon the whole; if there be more good than evil, more happineſs than miſery in this ſyſtem, as there undoubtedly is by the univerſal confeſſion, the concluſion is infallible, that the Author of this ſyſtem is a good Being. For

the end, deſign and intention of a powerful Being, of a Being whoſe will is not arbitrarily and partially determined ſometimes by one attribute and ſometimes by another, but, in every inſtance, by the harmonious concurrence of them all with his wiſdom, may ever be collected with the utmoſt certainty from the moſt predominant appearances in his works. Though, therefore, we ſhould not be able, as certainly we are not, to penetrate the ſecrets of the divine nature and economy, to ſolve all the nice and intricate objections, raiſed by ſubtle and peeviſh metaphyſicians concerning the origin, extent and conſequences of evil, and perfectly to reconcile them with our notions of infinite goodneſs and foreſight: yet whilſt we perceive ſuch a multitude of phenomena entirely agreeable to our ideas of goodneſs, we may, and we muſt, conclude, if we will argue juſtly, that an equal portion of goodneſs is diffuſed throughout the whole creation, even in thoſe inſtances, wherein

wherein it may not be ſo plainly obvious to our obſervation; the difference we muſt humbly impute to the defect of our comprehenſion, and not to any defect of the divine attributes. For a being of unlimited power and perfect wiſdom muſt always act conſiſtently with himſelf; nor can he be ſometimes good, and ſometimes evil, but muſt continually be the ſame, both yeſterday, to day, and for ever. But if God be a good Being, it will neceſſarily follow, that he muſt likewiſe be *juſt*. For it is of the eſſence of goodneſs directed by intelligence and wiſdom, after having examined the circumſtances of each particular caſe, to render unto every one according to the merit, or demerit of his behaviour; that is, it is of the eſſence of goodneſs to be juſt, and to act in all inſtances conformably to the nature, truth, and differences of things. To the *power*, therefore, the *underſtanding*, and the *wiſdom* of God, we may now join (to complete our relative idea of him)

goodneſs and *juſtice*. And ſo inſeparably are theſe moral perfections connected with the natural both in our notions, and in their actual exertion, that he who denies the former, in their higheſt conceiveable degree, to be eſſentially inherent in the divine Being, may ſoon be reduced to a neceſſity of denying the latter to belong to him; that is, he may ſoon be reduced to the neceſſity of denying the very exiſtence of God.

XIII. Say not, therefore, out of an extraordinary veneration for the divine Being, and to render, as you may perhaps imagine, the more exquiſite honour to the tranſcendent excellency of his nature, that his attributes are not to be underſtood by us, and explained in the literal ſenſe and proper acceptation of the words: ſay not, that the perfections of God, and the perfections of the ſame denomination in man, do not only differ from each other in degree and manner of exertion, but that they are alſo entirely

different

different in kind, without the leaſt ſimilarity between them. For this is to increaſe the difficulties, which, of themſelves, neceſſarily reſult from conſidering the divine attributes; it is to put them at a greater variance with the human underſtanding, and, in reality, to baniſh all intelligible notions of a Deity out of the world, leaving him nothing but an empty name, without any ideas annexed to it. The unknown ſubſtratum of an unknown ſet of attributes may be chance, or fate, or plaſtick nature; it may be juſt ſuch an infinite, eternal and unmeaning phantom, as ſenſualiſts and even atheiſts are willing to own, and ready to confeſs. If we are totally unacquainted with the nature of Gods wiſdom; if his goodneſs be of ſuch a ſort, that we can form no ideas of it, and his juſtice of a kind, not to be conceived by us: the conſequence is as certain as it is obvious, that we cannot draw any rational concluſion from theſe attributes, and that with regard to mankind at leaſt, God will be the ſame,

as if he was not wiſe, nor juſt, nor good. But this is all mockery and deluſion. For we, certainly, may argue concerning the Deity, as we do concerning other intelligent beings, from what we ſee and perceive of him, from ſuch clear repreſentations, as the face of nature and the uniform appearances of things offer to our ſenſes, reflection and reaſon. And the concluſions drawn from theſe arguments, as far as they go, are true and may ſafely be depended upon; or there is nothing in our reaſoning true and to be depended upon, but we are to be perpetually fluctuating in doubt, uncertainty, and irreſolution. Thus, for inſtance, from the art, contrivance, and deſign, which ſo generally and ſo manifeſtly diſcover themſelves in every various part of the conſtitution of the univerſe, as far as it falls within our obſervation, we are convinced, beyond a poſſibility of doubting, that the Author of this wondrous ſyſtem muſt be a wiſe and underſtanding Being: but even this argu-

mentation, plain and ſatisfactory as it appears to be, will be abſurd, our conviction folly, and there will be an irreconcileable variance between the premiſes and concluſion, unleſs the wiſdom of God be of the ſame kind with the wiſdom of man; that is, unleſs the actions of the Deity are uniformly directed to ſome end, and that end be promoted by the beſt means. For our arguments can prove nothing for an unknown wiſdom; or, what comes to the ſame point, for wiſdom in a ſenſe unknown. So again, with reference to the notions of mankind, there can be but one idea of goodneſs, and one idea of juſtice; and, conſequently, there can be no more than *one kind* of each, namely, an uniform diſpoſition to communicate happineſs, and to render unto every one according to their deſerts. He, therefore, who denies goodneſs and juſtice in God to be of the ſame kind as they are in us, and in our ideas, muſt deny that there is a diſpoſition in God to

communicate happineſs to his ſenſible creatures, and to act towards them agreeably to the eſſential differences of things. And he who denies this, denies, in fact, the goodneſs and juſtice of God, however ſplendidly he may declaim upon the intereſting ſubject, and ſeem to expreſs himſelf with a more than ordinary reverence for the divine majeſty. The *degrees*, indeed, of wiſdom, goodneſs, and juſtice, and the *manner*, wherein theſe ſeveral perfections are exerted, muſt be entirely different in God, from what we perceive them to be in man, and ſuch as are not within the reach of our faculties either to explain, or even to conceive. But ſtill the *kind* muſt be the ſame in both, as we moſt certainly experience the appearances and effects of both to be ſimilar and analogous *. Very eaſy, undoubtedly, it is, when we are diſcourſing of the divine nature ſo infinitely dif-

* See *Mr. Bulkleys notes on the philoſophical writings of Lord Bolingbroke, p.* 151.

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ferent from the human, to wade beyond our depth, and to plunge ourſelves into inextricable difficulties, by reaſon of the inconceiveable vaſtneſs of the ſubject on the one hand, and the narrowneſs of our underſtandings on the other: nor is it unuſual for weak and ignorant mortals, immerſed from their birth in material ideas, to make humanity the meaſure and ſtandard of the divinity. But theſe abſurdities we ſhall be able to avoid, as far as the condition of our nature will permit, if we will be content to confine our reaſoning upon this exalted topick to the phenomena of nature; if we will accuſtom ourſelves never to think of the Deity but with the utmoſt reſpect and veneration, or to ſpeak of him, but as of a Being, in whom all poſſible perfections are eſſentially inherent without any conceiveable limitation or alloy.

XIV. If, then, you are convinced, that there is a God, the almighty Maker of the univerſe; and are, moreover, perſuaded, that

that this Being is infinitely wiſe, and juſt, and good, and that theſe attributes are of the ſame kind with thoſe of a ſimilar denomination in man, and, as ſuch, may reaſonably and uſefully, tho' cautiouſly, be argued from—It will, I think, be abſolutely impoſſible for you to ſtop here, and not to go on to believe, that his *Providence* ſuperintends the whole creation. For is it conceiveable, that a Being ſo excellent in his nature, and ſo tranſcendent in every thing, which can be imagined greateſt, beſt and moſt perfect, after having adjuſted the immenſe machine of the univerſe, and impreſſed certain general laws of motion upon it, and commanded the ſeveral ſpecies of animals to increaſe and multiply, ſhould immediately withdraw his influence from his work, as if it were unworthy his future notice, care and goverment? That he ſhould never afterwards regard what became of it, or attend to what was doing amongſt his creatures? If *hazard* had no part in making this ſyſtem, why ſhould

you

you imagine, that it has any ſhare in directing and governing it? God, it is true, is infinitely happy in himſelf, always has been, and ever will continue, ſo—And will you moſt weakly and ridiculouſly conclude from thence, that it will give any interruption to his internal complacency and tranquillity, that it will put him to any pain or inconveniency, to watch over the affairs of the univerſe, and to guide them, from time to time, as he ſhall ſee beſt for the good of the whole? But to a Being, who is every where preſent, and in whom all his creatures, in the moſt literal ſenſe of the words, live and move, and have their exiſtence; to a God, who knows, at all times, what is and what ſhould be, as well as what has been, and to whoſe almighty will the powers of heaven and earth ſtand obedient, nothing can be difficult or troubleſome. What, indeed, the nature of Gods happineſs is, and wherein it conſiſts, it is abſolutely impoſſible for you, in your preſent ſtate of being,

being, either to deſcribe or even to conceive: only thus much you may be aſſured of, that this happineſs muſt be entirely conſiſtent with his acting agreeably to his own perfections, that is, with doing what is right and fit to be done in all caſes whatever. Man, therefore, being created by him a ſenſible being, capable of increaſing pleaſure and pain, and being, moreover, furniſhed by him with the neceſſary abilities to chooſe and prefer one ſort of conduct before another, has a kind of claim upon him to be taken notice of, if he make ſuch uſe of his faculties, as they were originally intended to have: and you may be ſure, that he will not be diſappointed of ſo reaſonable an expectation by a Being, of whoſe eſſence it is to do always what is right, and juſt, and good. Is it, then, ſuppoſed to be beneath the dignity of the Lord God almighty, and derogatory to the excellence of his exalted perfections, to behold what is done in this inferiour ſyſtem of exiſtence, and to ſuper-

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intend the actions of mankind? But are not all things equally his works, and of conſequence, as ſuch, all of them equally entitled to his notice, favour, and protection? Or does God take care of worlds, of nations, and of kingdoms only? But theſe greater bodies are made up of particulars, nor can it eaſily be conceived, how the whole ſhould come under his kind regard, and the part entirely eſcape his providential inſpection—But with God there is neither whole nor parts; neither great nor ſmall; neither ſuperiour nor inferiour but all things ſtand in the ſame near relation to him as his creatures, and are all equally removed from him, as the eternal and neceſſarily-exiſting God. All things alike call for his fatherly goodneſs to bleſs and to preſerve them, and all have an equal value and importance given to them, by being ſtamped with his impreſſion. Upon the whole, if it were not originally raſh and unadviſed in the divine Being to make this ſyſtem, wherein we are placed; ſurely with as little appear-

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ance of reaſon will it be inſinuated, that after having made it, it became unworthy of his providential care and future government.

XV. How far, indeed, the Author of this ſyſtem does immediately interpoſe in human affairs with his Providence, and in what particular inſtances: after what manner he governs the world, and by what ſecret workings of his power, in extraordinary conjunctures, over-rules the general laws of nature and uſual operation of ſecond cauſes, giveing them a new direction adapted to particular caſes, it is not for weak and narrow-ſighted mortals, who have only a partial view of his diſpenſations, and know nothing of the true ſituation, circumſtances and relations of things, to conceive, much leſs ſhould we preſume peremptorily to pronounce upon ſo intricate and profound a ſubject. But tho' it does not become us conceitedly to lay down rules for the divine conduct according to our imperfect notions of right and wrong,

wrong, of order and diſorder, raſhly to wield the thunderbolts of heaven, and expreſsly to ſay, what is the finger of God and what is not: yet may we, with certainty, conclude from the contemplation of the divine attributes; from the invariable uniformity obſerved in the motions of the material world for ſo many thouſand years together; and from the general regularity of the moral creation, notwithſtanding the continual diſorder and confuſion, which might naturally be expected to flow from the free actions of free agents, that the ſupreme Being has never, in fact, withdrawn his preſence from the world, but has always perſiſted to direct and govern it, in the wiſeſt and beſt manner, both with regard to its parts as well as the whole. That a Being of infinite power, intelligence and goodneſs cannot be an indolent, vacant, unattentive, or partial ſpectator of what is perpetually paſſing before him; that he muſt always do what is right, beſt, and moſt fitting upon the whole;

that

that he cannot look with the ſame eye of indifference upon thoſe rational beings, who endeavour to fulfil the end of their creation, and to act agreeably to what they have, by meditation, found to be his will, and upon thoſe who follow no rule of action, but the impetuous dictates of their paſſions, and who live to, and for, themſelves only, without caring for their Maker or their fellow-creatures—thus far we are certain, and this is amply ſufficient for all the ſolid purpoſes of human life. All beyond this is clouds and thick darkneſs. And to imagine that we know more than this; to imagine that we are able to explain the manner of Gods Providence, and to pronounce who are the favourites of heaven and who its enemies, can ſerve no other purpoſe, than to introduce arrogance and preſumption on the one hand, or melancholy and deſpair on the other. Nor let us forget to add upon this leading and moſt intereſting ſubject, that wherever the notion of a God has prevailed; that in whatever

whatever clime his exiſtence has been believed whether barbarous or civilized, there alſo the perſuaſion of a ſuper-intending Providence, both general and particular, has always been received and entertained. The two ideas can never be ſeparated without mutually deſtroying each other. A God without a Providence is an uſeleſs, joyleſs, and unmeaning God; it is the phantom of Epicurus, it is the infinite, inſenſible, and unintelligible of atheiſts.

XVI. Here then you will do well to pauſe a moment, and with the moſt attentive ſeriouſneſs to recollect and examine, how far your review has hitherto carried you, and whether there be any neceſſity for you to proceed farther in your religious enquiries. You are fully convinced, you ſay, that *there is a God*; and that this *God is a Being of all-conceivable perfections, ſelf-exiſtent, eternal, omnipotent, omniſcient, every where preſent, all-wiſe and all-good*; and that *his attributes are of the ſame kind with the qua-*

lities of a ſimilar denomination in man, though infinitely differing from them in degree. You ſay, moreover, that you ſincerely believe, that *the Lord God Almighty, who made the world, ſtill continues to preſide over it by his Providence, and to rule immediately in the kingdoms of men, whenever he ſees proper, by extraordinary interpoſals of his power.* And can you imagine, that nothing farther is required of you in conſequence of theſe principles, and that theſe fundamental articles of faith were never intended to have any effect, weight, or influence upon your reaſonable actions? Can you think, that the being or not-being of ſuch a God, as you have here acknowledged, is a matter of mere indifference with regard to your conduct, and that you need never enquire after, or conſult the divine will in any thing you do? Can you perſuade yourſelf, that all ſorts of behaviour are equally agreeable to the Deity, and that he is neither pleaſed nor diſpleaſed, whatever

ever rule of action his reaſonable creatures may chooſe to purſue? If theſe are your real, your mature and deliberate ſentiments, be conſiſtent with yourſelf, and ſay farther, what you cannot but think, that you were ſent into the world merely to eat, to drink and ſleep; merely to indulge your ſenſual appetites; to provide yourſelf with a ſucceſſor, and then to mix for ever with the unfeeling atoms of duſt. Say alſo, that there is no intrinſic excellency in any thing; no common and fixed rule of action for mankind to follow, no law, but ſuch as the civil magiſtrate by common conſent, for the ſake of preſent peace, ſhall be authoriſed to impoſe; but that all things are ſo far right, fitting and eligible, as they ſhall be more or leſs productive of immediate pleaſure to the agent. Say farther, what is the undoubted conſequence of theſe principles, that the preſent gratification of your ſenſes ought to be the ſole motive, mea-

ſure and end of all you do. But if you are ſhocked, as I doubt not but you are, at a ſyſtem ſo utterly irreconcileable to all notions of an infinitely intelligent, wiſe and good Creator; if reaſon, common-ſenſe and conſcience, all recoil at the bare recital of opinions ſo derogatory to the divine attributes and a ſuperintending Providence; ſo ſubverſive of your own trueſt and moſt laſting happineſs; ſo contrary to the nature and eſſential differences of things; and ſo introductory of all kind of miſchief, diſorder, and confuſion into ſociety——you will then think it your duty, with the utmoſt care and diligence, to go on to enquire what ſort of behaviour may juſtly be expected from you towards that God, whom you profeſs to believe; and after what manner this belief ought to influence your conduct both with reſpect to yourſelf, and to thoſe other reaſonable beings, who are all equally the offspring of the ſame common parent. Nor will you ſtop here,

but

but as you find yourſelf irreſiſtibly impelled to deſire your own happineſs, you will moreover examine, how far the rule of moral action reſulting from your relation to God is productive, likewiſe, of your greateſt good, and conformable to thoſe natural differences of things, which you cannot but look upon as certain ſigns and expreſſions of the will of their Maker.

XVII. With reſpect then to the Deity himſelf—to act conſiſtently with what you profeſs to believe of him, is conſtantly to preſerve in your mind the higheſt poſſible honour, eſteem and veneration for his holy name, and to expreſs theſe reverential ſentiments in a ſuitable regulation of all your outward actions. It is to love him as your beſt benefactor, to hope in him as the only giver of all good gifts, and to truſt in him and depend upon him as your ſureſt guide, protector and defender. It is to obey his whole will, to the beſt of your power, however diſcovered or made known

unto you, it is contentedly to ſubmit yourſelf to all his diſpenſations, as the ſovereign arbiter of all things. You cannot act conſiſtently with your belief of a God, unleſs all your regard, worſhip and devotion be payed unto him alone; unleſs you employ your whole ſelf, all your powers both of ſoul and body, in his ſervice and for his glory; unleſs you pray unto him regularly for whatever you may ſtand in need of hereafter, and return him your moſt hearty and grateful thanks for all the neceſſaries, conveniencies and comforts of life, which he has already beſtowed upon you. To preſerve in you a lively ſenſe of the tranſcendent excellency of the divine nature, to keep up a due acknowledgement of your momentary dependance upon him, and to put you in continual remembrance of your various obligations to him, the inſtitution of prayer and the obſervation of an external worſhip are extremely uſeful, and, conſequently, very rational expedients.

dients. Only let all your outward acts of devotion and piety be practiſed in a manner reconcileable to the other duties, which you owe to God, namely, to an aweful reverence of him, which conſiſts in the inward ſentiments wholly and an abſolute reſignation to his will.

XVIII. To act, moreover, in entire conformity with your belief of an all-wiſe, and all-good Creator and Governour of the univerſe, you muſt take care to keep *yourſelf*, at all times, in ſuch a frame and diſpoſition both of body and mind, as may be conſiſtent with the perpetual ſubmiſſion, truſt, obedience and veneration, both external and internal, which you owe to the moſt excellent of Beings; you muſt reſtrain your appetites with temperance; you muſt regulate your paſſions with moderation; you muſt apply yourſelf to the buſineſs of your ſtation in the world with attention, induſtry and contentment; and, above all things, you muſt endeavour to preſerve the being, which He has given

to you, as long as you are able. In the higheſt degree, therefore, does that perſon affront the goodneſs of his Creator, and diſobey the wiſdom of the ſupreme diſpoſer of all events, who, diſguſted and weary of living, voluntarily deprives himſelf of his exiſtence. Nor let the diſcontented ſelf-murtherer think to excuſe or mitigate this inſolent act of rebellion againſt Providence, by pretending that he could no longer ſupport the miſery of the ſituation in which his Maker had placed him. For the man, who acts under the influence of a thorough belief, truſt and confidence in the power, wiſdom and mercies of God, will reſignedly acquieſce in all the diſpenſations of Providence, whatever ſtruggles it may coſt him to obtain the victory over himſelf: he will always hope the beſt, and, in his utmoſt grief and diſtreſs, will wait with patience, till the appointed time of his deliverance ſhall come from that good Being, without whoſe knowledge he could not have ſuffered,

fered, and who alone has authority regularly to diſmiſs him from his ſtation.

XIX. In the laſt place, to act conſiſtently with your belief of God and his moral attributes, is to treat your fellow-creatures, as children of the ſame common parent, with affection and reſpect. It is to be kind, gentle and tender-hearted towards them, as knowing them to be poſſeſſed of the ſame feelings, appetites, paſſions and reaſon as yourſelf, and created for the ſame gracious purpoſes. It is not only to render unto every man what is ſtrictly due unto him by the laws of your country, but likewiſe to act by him, in all caſes, as you would wiſh to be done unto in ſimilar circumſtances. It is to encourage that natural diſpoſition both to will and to do good unto every man, which you feel, amongſt your other paſſions, implanted in your breaſt by the Author of your being, and never to neglect a proper opportunity, agreeably to your ſituation and circumſtances

ſtances in life, to aſſiſt and advance the real welfare and happineſs of a fellow-creature. It is to be animated with a holy deſire to imitate God, and to be as like to him as you poſſibly can, by making perpetual advances in juſtice, mercy, fidelity, truth and beneficence. For tho' there undoubtedly is, and always will be, an infinite diſtance and diſparity of degree between the moſt ſublime and exalted human benevolence and the divine: yet it is true, likewiſe, and ſelf-evident, that ſo far as any reaſonable creature acts upon a motive or principle of willing the happineſs of other beings, ſo far does he, in a ſtrict and proper ſenſe, reſemble or imitate God: and to do this muſt be the duty, and will be the perpetual ambition of every perſon, who eſteems and reverences the Deity as the ſtandard of all that is truly happy, and truly perfect. *

* See notes on Lord Bolingbrokes Philoſophy, by Mr. Bulkley.

XX. Such,

XX. Such, then, muſt be the general tenour of your behaviour, if you are reſolved to act conſiſtently with what you profeſs to believe concerning the divine Being, and his attributes. Nor will a different ſyſtem of duty or moral action offer itſelf to your inſpection and purſuit, if you ſeriouſly examine your own nature, powers, propenſities and inclinations, and attend to the inſtigations of that invincible deſire of happineſs, which is ever uppermoſt in your mind, and is the ruling principle of your life. Upon the ſuppoſition that you were made to be happy, and that happineſs is the great end of your being (as undoubtedly it is relatively to yourſelf) nothing certainly can be your duty, that is, you cannot be morally obliged either to do, or to forbear any thing, which does not ſome way or other (either in its own nature, or by poſitive inſtitution) contribute to this end: and, conſequently, every thing which does ſo contribute muſt be your reaſonable rule of action,

action, and ought to be uniformly obſerved by you as the indiſpenſible law of your being. You muſt, therefore, love the Lord your God with all your ſoul; you muſt devoutly reverence his holy Name; you muſt put your whole truſt and confidence in him, and endeavour to act agreeably to his will in all things—You muſt, moreover, labour to ſubdue your appetites, and to reduce your irregular paſſions to the obedience of right reaſon. Nor muſt you neglect any opportunity of being kind, affectionate, juſt and gentle towards your fellow-creatures. For, if you conſult experience, if you conſult your own feelings, if you conſult the univerſal voice, you will be ſoon convinced, that theſe are the beſt, the moſt natural and indeed the only effectual means to obtain that ſolid eaſe, peace and ſatisfaction of mind, which is the ſureſt foundation of true and laſting happineſs. To reverence the almighty Maker of heaven and earth, to depend upon

upon his goodneſs for a bleſſing upon your endeavours, punctually to obey his commandments, to be grateful to him for paſt benefits, to pray for future mercies and reſignedly to acquieſce in all his diſpenſations, is the moſt infallible method you can purſue to become his friend, and to entitle yourſelf to his favour and protection. By temperance, induſtry and ſobriety, by moderating your enjoyments of the good, and by bearing with patience the evil things of life, you not only preſerve your body as free from pain and diſeaſe, as the intractability of its material compoſition will permit, but you alſo acquire that content and tranquillity of ſoul, which are the genuine fruit of a ſelf-approved conduct. And will any one deny, that the practice of univerſal juſtice, equity and benevolence is not as direct and adequate a means to obtain the good-will of our fellow-creatures, and to promote the general welfare, as any phyſical cauſe or geometrical

operation

operation is fitted to produce its natural effect *.

XXI. Here, then, you have exactly the ſame rule of moral action pointed out and preſcribed unto you from the conſideration of your own nature, intereſt, and happineſs, as you found before to reſult from your idea of God and his attributes, only preſſed upon you with the additional ſtrength of a new obligation. Nor, indeed, could the event of your enquiry poſſibly be otherwiſe. For had one ſyſtem of duty ariſen from your belief of a God, and had a contrary rule of action been required of you from the neceſſity, which you feel yourſelf under of willing and purſuing your own happineſs, you would have found yourſelf divided between the operation of two contrary obligations: you would have been obliged to will your own happineſs, and

* See *Evidences of natural and revealed religion, by Dr. Clarke.*

and not to will it at the ſame time, which had been an imperfection in your original conſtitution, utterly irreconcileable with all notions of an intelligent, wiſe, and good Creator. For the ſame reaſon, therefore, you may be fully aſſured, that upon contemplating the nature of things themſelves and their eſſential differences, a rule of reaſonable action, ſimilar in all reſpects to that which you have already inveſtigated, will preſent itſelf to your view. For there is a certain uniformity in all Gods deſigns and works; they all amicably conſpire and co-operate to the ſame ends; they all draw together the ſame way; nor can they poſſibly lead you, by contrary routes, to the purſuit of duty and happineſs. And, accordingly, to refuſe to honour and obey that God, from whoſe power, wiſdom and goodneſs you received your being, and to whom you are continually indebted for your preſervation, is to be guilty of an equal abſurdity and inconſiſtency in practice,

tice, as if you had denied in ſpeculation, that the effect owes any thing to its cauſe, or that the whole is bigger than a part. So again, to refuſe to deal with all men equitably, and with every man as you deſire he ſhould deal with you, is to be guilty of the ſame unreaſonableneſs and ſelf-contradiction, as if you had affirmed one number or quantity to be equal to another, and yet that that other, at the ſame time, is not equal to the firſt. Thus alſo, he who acknowledges himſelf obliged to the practice of certain duties towards God and man, and yet takes no care, either to preſerve his own being, or, at leaſt, not to preſerve himſelf in ſuch a ſtate and temper of body and mind, as may beſt enable him to perform thoſe duties, is altogether as inexcuſable and abſurd, as he who, in any other matter, ſhould affirm one thing, at the ſame time that he denies another, without which the former could not poſſibly be true; or ſhould undertake one

one thing, at the ſame time that he obſtinately omits another, without which the former is by no means practicable. To ſuffer yourſelf, therefore, to be governed by arbitrary humours and raſh paſſions; and to treat things, as diſtinguiſhed from one another merely by the natural good or evil, which immediately accompanies them—is not this, in reality, to ſet up your own unreaſonable ſelf-will, in oppoſition to the true nature and difference of things? Is not this to endeavour, as much as in you lies, to make things to be what they are not, and what they cannot be? And can there be a higher preſumption and inſolence, as well as a greater abſurdity, imagined? It is to act in expreſs contradiction to the underſtanding, reaſon and judgement, which God has given to you, on purpoſe to enable you to diſcern the difference between things; it is to attempt to deſtroy that order, by which the univerſe

ſubſiſts; it is to offer the greateſt indignity conceiveable to the wiſe Creator, who made all things as they are, and continues to govern every thing, according to the laws of their ſeveral natures. In a word, all wilful deviation from, and perverſion of, right is the ſame abſurdity in moral matters, as it would be in natural things to pretend to alter the proportions of numbers, and to take away the demonſtrable relations and properties of mathematical figures; it is to make light darkneſs, and darkneſs light, to call ſweet bitter, and bitter ſweet *.

XXII. The concluſion, therefore, is as indubitable, as any demonſtration in geometry can be, that, as a reaſonable creature, you are under a moral neceſſity, or obligation, to conform to a ſyſtem of conduct clearly marked out and preſcribed unto you by the nature of God himſelf, the nature of man, and the nature

* See *evidences of natural and revealed religion, by Dr. Clarke.* Prop. 1.

ture of things; that is, to a ſyſtem of duty expreſsly commanded and ſanctified by the poſitive will and appointment of the univerſal Creator. For at the ſame time that almighty God, by creating, declared it to be his will, that things ſhould exiſt in the manner they do, preferably to all others, he pronounced to the whole world, that all ſuch moral obligations, as are the reſult of the eſſential differences and relations of things, are likewiſe his poſitive will and command. At the ſame time that the Deity ſo conſtituted the nature of man, as to be able by ſearching to find out and know his Creator, and, to a proper degree, his attributes, he manifeſtly declared, that it is his poſitive will and command, that he ſhould behave himſelf, in all reſpects, agreeably to ſuch knowledge. At the ſame time that the benevolent Author of this ſyſtem implanted in mankind an invariable and invincible deſire to purſue and attain happineſs, and furniſhed them

with the neceſſary abilities to examine, ſelect and approve the moſt effectual means leading to this great end of their being; he declared in the moſt intelligible language, that it is his poſitive will and command, that they ſhould uſe the powers of their minds for this purpoſe, and follow that rule of action, whieh their beſt and improved reaſon told them would be moſt conducive to it. For where an intelligent being acts with deſign, and has power ſufficient to execute his deſign, his general will and intention may be as plainly and clearly perceived and underſtood from what he does, as from what he ſays. Seeing, therefore, that the nature of things, the nature of man, and the nature of God, all, as you have allowed, with united voice ſpeak the ſame ſignificant and intereſting language; and all, with the moſt entire harmony and uniformity, direct you to the ſame rules of moral action; you cannot but conclude, that rules of morality thus pro-

promulgated, thus recommended and thus enforced, ought to be highly reverenced, and punctually obeyed, as the plan of infinite wiſdom, as the expreſs will and unerring command of the univerſal Creator, as the dictates of right reaſon and the laws of nature, as virtue and natural religion. Rules of duty and moral action thus founded have no connection at all with the civil magiſtrate and his ſanctions, any farther than as they hold out the moſt perfect exemplars for him to copy after in his inſtitutions; they are, indeed, unchangeable, univerſal, and equally obligatory upon all mankind, at all times and in all places, as far as they are able to diſcover them by the due uſe of their rational faculties; and as far as their neceſſary avocations and interruptions will furniſh them with opportunities to make themſelves acquainted with them.

XXIII. Being thus convinced, that there is a certain rule of moral action to

be purſued by you, as you are a rational creature able to know God, to diſcern wherein your trueſt happineſs conſiſts, and to inveſtigate the eſſential differences of things; or, in other words, being fully convinced that there is a law and religion of nature ſanctifyed by the will, and preſſed upon your conſcience by the Author of your being——You may now proceed one ſtep farther in your enquiry, and, with aſſurance, conclude, that as far as you uſe your beſt endeavours to find out, and to act agreeably to this rule or law of your nature; ſo far will you be able to attain the end of your being, in a proportionably larger ſhare of perfection and happineſs: and, on the other hand, that ſo far as you deviate from, oppoſe, and act contrary to this rule or law of your being, ſo far will you detract from your perfection, and fall ſhort of your greateſt happineſs. For vain are your paſt reaſonings upon the being and attributes of God, upon the nature of

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man and the differences of things; nor will any concluſions drawn from your notions of good order, juſtice and government, be admitted, if there be not a ſufficient ſanction, either natural or poſitive, annexed to the law of your being; if thoſe perſons who make a rational uſe of the power which they have over their actions, and endeavour to live conformably to what they know of the will of their Creator, are not, upon the whole, happier than thoſe who neglect and deſpiſe it. To aſſert the contrary is to aſſert, that rewards and puniſhments are not of the eſſence of a law; it is to aſſert, that God almighty is a legiſlator without dignity, a governour without rights, and that his laws have no authority; it is to aſſert, that a good God will not, in all inſtances, do what is juſt and right. You may therefore argue with yourſelf upon this very intereſting ſubject in the following manner; and, as your arguments cannot fail of convincing your unprejudiced

underſtanding, it will certainly be your trueſt wiſdom to ſuffer your reaſoning to have its full force and influence upon your practice. Has the God of nature really given to mankind a rule of moral action? I confeſs that he has. Does he expect that this rule, as far as it is known, ſhould be attended to, complied with, and obſerved by them? Without doubt he does, or his conduct would be to the laſt degree trifling. Can it then poſſibly be imagined, that the conſequence of my actions, with regard to my happineſs or miſery, will be exactly the ſame, whether I voluntarily break the law of my being, or punctually obſerve it? Certainly not; unleſs I can firſt perſuade myſelf to believe, what I find to be impoſſible, namely, that Gods laws are no laws, or that they are left naked and defenceleſs, and may be neglected and violated with impunity.

XXIV. But this argument may be viewed in another light, and in a point of this

this great importance to your moral conduct, you cannot take too much pains to come at the truth. For if God beholds what paſſes in the world, as you profeſs to believe that he does, you cannot but conclude, either that he is pleaſed with thoſe perſons, who, out of a conſcientious regard to his will, obey the laws which he has given to them, and is diſpleaſed with thoſe who take no notice of them, to do them—or that he looks upon both with an eye of perfect indifference—But, if this latter be ſuppoſed to be the caſe, muſt it not be ſaid by thoſe who are of this opinion, either that there is no eſſential difference between the behaviour of theſe two ſorts of men, (which is abſolutely to confound truth with falſehood, and to deſtroy the fundamental diſtinction between right and wrong, good and evil) or that God does not look upon, and judge of them, as they really are, than which a greater abſurdity cannot be conceived. But if God approves of

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one ſort of conduct in his creatures more than another, as he cannot but do, if he be intelligent, wiſe and good; the conſequence is indiſputable, that he will likewiſe find ſome way or other to ſignify his approbation or diſlike by making the proper diſtinctions between the actors; and that thoſe perſons, whoſe behaviour has been agreeable to him, will, upon the whole, be happier than thoſe, whoſe behaviour has not been agreeable to him. For to approve the conduct of his creatures, or not to approve it, to be pleaſed or diſpleaſed with them, will be entirely the ſame, equally unintelligible and uſeleſs to any purpoſe of truth and goodneſs, if ſuch internal judgement of the Deity be not, ſome time or other, ſuitably accompanied with external marks of diſtinction. If, therefore, the ſanction of rewards and puniſhments, the ſanction of happineſs and miſery, which you are now convinced muſt neceſſarily be annexed the one to the obedience, the other

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to the diſobedience of the law of nature and reaſon, does not always, and regularly, take place in the preſent ſtate of your exiſtence, (as, perhaps, it does not, in a ſingle inſtance, in an exact proportion to the merit or demerit of the agent) if the ways of Providence are not univerſally equal in this life, (as it is impoſſible they ſhould be in a world of *matter and free-will* without the perpetual intervention of infinite wiſdom, of which continual intervention there are ſmall appearances) you cannot but conclude, if God be the common parent, king and lawgiver, that there will be another ſtate after the preſent, wherein your exiſtence will be either continued or renewed unto you, and wherein exact juſtice will be rendered unto every man, according to his behaviour in this life. To ſay, therefore, that there is no ſanction of the law of nature, otherwiſe than as it is confirmed, recommended and enforced by the civil inſtitutions of your country; or as inveterate

inveterate cuſtom has accidentally aſſociated the ideas of pleaſure and pain to one manner of acting more than to another: to ſay that all things come alike to all, and that the ſame chance happeneth to the man, who balances his paſſions by the rules of right reaſon, and to him, who never thinks of God but to blaſpheme his name, or of his fellow-creatures, but as they may be made uſeful for the indulgence of his unreſtrained appetites: and to add, moreover, that the preſent confuſion of happineſs and miſery will never be rendered more regular and equitable——is to aſſert, that all your actions are indifferent both in themſelves, and in their conſequences; that there is no law of your being, or none worthy your attention and regard; that there is no virtue nor vice, no morality nor irreligion—it is, indeed, effectually to baniſh all notions of a wiſe, juſt and good Being from the creation, inſpection and government of the world; it is, in reality, to aſſert,

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that there is no God, and that all things are left to the ſenſeleſs domination of chance, fate and confuſion.

XXV. *The being of a powerful, intelligent, juſt and good God, and the exiſtence of the human ſoul in a future ſtate* are ſo indiſſolubly connected together, that they cannot be disjoined without their mutual deſtruction. Caſes, at leaſt, may eaſily be conceived, wherein it will be impoſſible even for omnipotent wiſdom to do what is right, equal and fit to be done, but upon the ſuppoſition of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. For are there not perſons in the world, (may not ſuch be imagined with great appearance of probability, tho' we ſhould not be able preciſely to determine who they are) are there not perſons, I aſk, in the world, who never reflect ſeriouſly upon the Deity and his attributes, or pay the leaſt reverence, regard, or duty to his holy name? Who build their fortune and their happineſs upon the miſery

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and ruin of their fellow-creatures? Who follow no law, but the impetuous cravings of their ſenſual appetites, nor attend to any conſequences of their actions, but ſuch as the civil conſtitutions of their country may, by chance, have annexed to them? Whoſe hours, to all appearance, paſs away in one continual round of mirth and jollity, without ever feeling the leaſt inward compunction and uneaſineſs? And ſhall it be in the power of ſuch perſons to enjoy their unreaſonable and unſocial pleaſures pure and unbated, and, at laſt, entirely to ſubſtract themſelves from the hands of divine juſtice? It is in their power effectually to do this, by adding yet another and greater deviation from the law of their being to all their former tranſgreſſions, namely, by putting an end to their exiſtence, before the evil days come on, and the natural conſequences of their irregularities begin to lay hold of them——So, on the other hand, have there not been frequent

quent inſtances of perſons, who have been extremely wretched in this life, merely on account of their conſcientious adherence to the law of their nature, that is, to the will of their God? Have there not been religious and benevolent men, the ſum of whoſe miſery, in certain periods of their exiſtence, has exceeded the ſum of their happineſs? And ſhall it not be within the power of their merciful Creator; ſhall it not be within the reach of all-powerful goodneſs to compenſate them for the ſufferings, which they have undergone merely on account of their piety? On the contrary, ſhall it be in the power of the moſt abandoned of mankind to rob them of the reward due to their fidelity, ſubmiſſion and patience? and to convert even their obedience to the dictates of their conſciences, and the commands of their God, into ſo many cauſes of augmenting their miſery, without a poſſibility of compenſation or relief? Deny

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thy God, ſays the inſolent tyrant to a good man, who, from his infancy perhaps, has already been converſant with pain and grief; pay thy religious homage to ſtocks and ſtones; commit the moſt horrid contradictions to what thou acknowledgeſt to be the law of thy being; otherwiſe, expect a lingering death of wretchedneſs, attended with the ſharpeſt torments, which the moſt cruel invention can inflict. Far from complying with theſe injurious commands, or departing, in the leaſt, from his integrity, the afflicted martyr, full of reſignation and relying entirely upon the future goodneſs of his God, reſolutely meets his fate in all its terrors. Where, then, in this caſe, is the reward either natural or poſitive, which ought to be annexed to the obſervation of the divine law? Even the almighty God himſelf, the parent, the king, the righteous lawgiver of mankind, can here do nothing either to recompence the miſery of the unhappy ſufferer, or to vindicate the honour

nour of his violated laws, if there be not another life after this. Hard, indeed, it is for us preciſely to aſcertain who are the really-happy, and who the really-miſerable in this world; as hard as it is for us to determine who are the ſincerely-good, and who the impenitently-wicked: but however ignorant we may be ſuppoſed to be, and apt to miſtake in our judgements concerning the true ſtate and condition of mankind; yet we are aſſured, that God cannot err nor be miſtaken in theſe matters, and that the Being, to whom all hearts are open and from whom no ſecrets are hid, can never be at a loſs to know, where and how to beſtow his rewards and puniſhments, according to the ſtricteſt rules of diſtributive juſtice.

XXVI. In exact correſpondence with theſe deductions from the being and attributes of God, from the neceſſity of vindicating the honour and enforcing the obligation of the divine laws by the ſanction of rewards and puniſhments,

and from the apparent inequality in the preſent adminiſtration of Providence—— In exact correſpondence, I ſay, with the concluſions drawn from theſe ſeveral topicks in proof of our future exiſtence in another world, and in confirmation of them, may be added the various arguments taken from the powers, paſſions and capacity of the ſoul, joined to the conduct of the divine wiſdom obſerved in the general order and economy of things. It is in truth impoſſible deliberately to ſurvey, and ſeriouſly to contemplate the nature and various operations of that principle within us, which moves and animates the human frame, and is, indeed, our life, and not be fully convinced, that it muſt be ſomething entirely diſtinct from the body, that it cannot be *matter*. Abſtruſe as this ſubject is generally ſuppoſed to be, and remote from common apprehenſion; yet ſurely it requires no great reach of capacity, nor extent of literature, to underſtand the following queſtions, and

and to return ſatisfactory anſwers to them. Are we not all conſcious to ourſelves of ſome active principle lodged within us, able to admit, to comprehend, and, with attention, to view ideas; to compare them with each other, and to judge how far they agree together and wherein they diſagree? Is it not frequently in our power to recall to our remembrance things long ſince paſt, and, ſometimes, even to form probable opinions of what may happen hereafter? Are we not able to digeſt our ideas into a proper order and method; to reduce them into their ſeveral claſſes, to correct them when we have reaſon to think that our ſenſes have been deceived in the tranſmiſſion of them, to draw concluſions from them, and to form general notions and propoſitions from particular perceptions? Are we not conſcious alſo, that this ſame *internal power* (call it by what name you will, *ſoul*, or *mind*, or *ſpirit*) enjoys the moſt perfect freedom of determining and

acting; and that it knows how to will and chooſe the good, both natural and moral, and to refuſe the evil? But are theſe the properties, the qualities, the perfections of body eſſentially inert and unactive? Of every the minuteſt atom which makes up the infinite aggregate of matter? They muſt be ſo, if they are the properties of matter, as ſuch. Can it be conceived that matter, ſenſeleſs in itſelf and in its own nature, however figured or moved, however ſubtilized or fermented, can become pleaſure or pain, deſire or averſion? Is it not, indeed, utterly impoſſible, that that penetrating underſtanding and accurate judgement; that ſtrength of memory and readineſs of wit; that juſtice, prudence and magnanimity; that charity and beneficence to mankind; that ingenuous fear and aweful love of God; that experienced inſight into the works of nature; that inexhauſted fountain of eloquence, and thoſe exalted diſcoveries of mathemati-

cal theorems, which are altogether the moſt uſeful and ornamental diſtinctions of our ſpecies—is it not, I aſk, perfectly impoſſible, that effects ſuch as theſe ſhould proceed from the blind ſhufflings and caſual claſhings of atoms? We muſt conclude, therefore, if any thing may ever be concluded from the moſt clear and undoubted principles, that the ſoul of man, that the active power within us, is ſomething totally diſtinct from matter, and, in its own nature, entirely independant of it—we muſt conclude that the human ſoul (without perplexing ourſelves with intricate queſtions concerning the nature of its ſubſtance, its union with the body, and its manner of acting with and upon it) is ſo far made in the image of its Creator, as to be a ſpirit or immaterial: and, conſequently, that it is extremely probable, that when the body ſhall again return to that duſt, from whence it was originally taken, the ſoul ſhall ſtill ſurvive, (unhurt amidſt the wreck of matter,)

cloathed with all its former conſciouſneſs, and in full capacity both of enjoying pleaſure and enduring pain, as uſual. How far, indeed, the omnipotence of God may be able to give to any particular ſyſtem, or combination of matter, the faculty of thinking: or, whether it be not a thing, in its own nature, abſolutely impoſſible to ſuper-induce conſciouſneſs upon any maſs of matter, made up of infinitely-ſmall, ſolid and extended atoms, all of them equally qualifyed with the ſame eſſential properties, we need not be over-ſollicitous to enquire; both as the nature, truth and ſanctions of virtue will not be, in the leaſt, affected by the determination, and as thoſe perſons, who argue for the poſſibility (rather than the probability) of ſuch a ſuper-induction, give up the queſtion, which we have been contending for, namely, that matter, of itſelf, is wholly incapable of becoming a human ſoul, of becoming knowledge, appetite and paſſion,

ſion, without the immediate interpoſition of almighty power.

XXVII. But the arguments in proof of an exiſtence in a future ſtate taken from the nature of the human ſoul, its capacity, powers, inſtincts and affections, may, perhaps, carry ſtill farther force and conviction with them, when viewed in a ſomewhat different light; and upon a ſubject of this leading influence and importance nothing ſhould be omitted, which may poſſibly have an effect to illumine the underſtanding of the doubtful, to remove their real ſcruples, and to perſuade them of that happy immortality in another ſtate, which will certainly attend the regular diſcharge of their duty in the preſent. That God can do nothing in vain, that the ſupreme wiſdom never acts but for ſome end and deſign, the whole ſyſtem of nature every where proclaims in the moſt intelligible language—why then all that pomp and profuſion of perfections, which have been beſtowed upon

mankind? Why that earneſt deſire, that univerſal ſenſe, expectation and preſage of a future ſtate, that perpetual longing after immortality, which are ſo radically interwoven in the conſtitution of the human mind? Why that ſecret dread and horror at the apprehenſion of falling into nothing? Why that pleaſing conſciouſneſs and ſilent ſatisfaction upon acting agreeably to the dictates of right reaſon, and the will of God? Why that anguiſh and remorſe, which is always felt upon the firſt commiſſion even of the moſt private wickedneſs? Are theſe common notions, theſe intereſting ſentiments, theſe anticipations of futurity, theſe natural propenſities (as they may be properly called) implanted in us for no wiſe purpoſe, and given to us with no view, and for no end at all? They muſt be implanted in us for no wiſe purpoſe, and given to us for no ſufficient end, unleſs there be a life after this, in which we are nearly intereſted, and of which they are intended

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to be a ſort of earneſt, a pledge, an admonition and aſſurance. Man, conſidered merely with relation to his preſent exiſtence, ſeems to be ſent into the world only to eat, to drink, to ſleep and to propagate his kind: he provides himſelf with a ſucceſſor, and immediately quits his poſt to make room for him. But can it, with the leaſt appearance of probability, be imagined, that an infinitely wiſe and good Being would make ſuch glorious creatures for ſo low and mean a purpoſe? Can he delight in the production of ſuch abortive intelligences, ſuch ſhort-lived reaſonable creatures? Is it, indeed, poſſible for us to conceive, that the faculties of the human mind, which are capable, by their original frame and conſtitution, of being exalted to ſo high a degree of perfection, and of receiving new improvements to all eternity, ſhould fall away into nothing, almoſt as ſoon as created? Is it, indeed, poſſible for us really to believe, that a thinking being, who is in a perpetual

tual progreſs of improvement, and traveling on from perfection to perfection, after having juſt looked abroad into the works of its Creator, and made a few diſcoveries of his infinite knowledge, goodneſs and power, muſt periſh at its firſt ſetting out, and in the very beginning of its enquiries? In vain ſhall we ſearch for the conſummate wiſdom, which ſhines through all Gods other works, in the formation of man, unleſs we contemplate this world, as only a nurſery for the next; and can perſuade ourſelves, that the ſeveral generations of rational creatures, which riſe up and diſappear in ſuch quick ſucceſſions, are only to receive the firſt rudiments of exiſtence here, and afterwards to be tranſplanted into ſome more friendly climate, where they may ſpread and flouriſh to all eternity. To view the ſoul as ſtill going on from knowledge to knowledge, and from virtue to virtue; to conſider, that by its original make and conſtitution it is deſtined to ſhine for ever

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with new acceſſions of glory, and to brighten from everlaſting to everlaſting, is not only extremely agreeable to its original diſpoſition, affections and apprehenſions, but helps alſo to excite and confirm in us juſt and ſublime ideas of the almighty Father of ſpirits.* What, indeed, will be the nature of that future ſtate, to which we are every moment haſtening; what the exact meaſure of happineſs, which ſhall be diſtributed to good men in it, and what the preciſe quantity of miſery, which ſhall be the lot of evil men: when the future judgement ſhall commence, by whoſe miniſtration, and after what manner it ſhall be conducted, we can know nothing with certainty by the uſe of our intellectual faculties; ſuch ſcience being too high and too remote from all our preſent ideas of ſenſe and reflection for mere man to attain unto it——Only thus much we may

See 8th vol. of the Spectator.

may be aſſured of, that a Being of eſſential wiſdom, goodneſs, holineſs and juſtice, will always do what is right, fit and beſt to be done upon the whole.

XXVIII. To look, therefore, upon the human life as a jeſt, and either contemptuouſly to treat the rational ſpecies as a ſuperior order of brutes; or maliciouſly to ridicule them, as ſo many mimick actors ſtrutting their ſeveral unintereſting parts upon the changeful theatre of the world, is to dig up and to deſtroy the very foundations of all duty and religion, and to encourage confuſion and every work of unrighteouſneſs; it is to introduce an abſolute indifferency with regard to moral good and evil; it is utterly to reject the intervention of an underſtanding, wiſe and good Being in the formation of man; it is to regard this ſyſtem and all things in it as the undeſigned effect of hazard, or the unmeaning operation of fate and neceſſity. For if God be our creator, governour and lawgiver, it is impoſſible to

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conceive that he will not intereſt himſelf (if we may uſe the expreſſion) in the work of his own hands; it is impoſſible to conceive, that he would form ſuch a creature as man is, ſenſible, rational, and capable of making perpetual improvements in knowledge and virtue, for no other purpoſe, but that after a momentary exiſtence upon earth, full of trouble anxiety and diſappointment, he ſhould mix again for ever with the unfeeling clods of the church-yard; or that he would have furniſhed him with ſuch exquiſite abilities both of body and mind, only to till the ground from whence he was taken, or to make proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof. It is the finger of an all-wiſe Being ſo viſibly appearing in the conſtitution of man, which gives to him all his dignity, importance and diſtinction—and let thoſe, who ſeem ſo fond of vilifying the human kind, who are ſtill ſpeaking in the moſt abject terms of their lowlyneſs, their nothingneſs and

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the infinite diſproportion between the creature and Creator, conſider well with themſelves, whether their humility be not affected, deceitful and hypocritical; whether it be not put on with a view to ſhake off the reſtraints of religion, and, by pretending to look upon themſelves and all that they can do as beneath the divine notice, to leave themſelves no other rules to direct their actions, than ſuch as their licentious appetites and paſſions may ſuggeſt to them. To know that life is a jeſt, and to be aſſured that all its duties, offices and engagements are works of indifference, mere mockeries, and have nothing ſerious in them, we muſt wait till the great teacher, Death, has dropped the curtain, and the laſt ſcene ſhall be entirely cloſed. But if we know any thing at all, after that tremendous period ſhall be paſſed, it will certainly be, that life was a buſineſs of the utmoſt moment and concern; that it was entruſted to us by our infinitely wiſe and good Creator for

the moſt weighty and important purpoſes; that we muſt render a ſtrict account of the uſe, which we have made in it, of our time and talents; and that an eternity of happineſs, or an eternity of miſery depends upon it.

XXIX. But will it not be here demanded by attentive, well-informed and devout enquirers, from whence we originally derived the ſyſtem of virtue and religion, which we have been above deſcribing? Will it not be aſked by thoſe perſons, who are in ſearch of the whole will of God, as the beſt rule and meaſure of religious obedience; by thoſe perſons, who, free from paſſion, prejudice and prepoſſeſſion, have nothing elſe in view but the inveſtigation of truth, the uniform diſcharge of their duty and the acquiſition of their moſt perfect happineſs, whether we have not laid too great a ſtreſs upon the powers of the human mind in the deductions which we have been making? Whether we have not aſcribed rules of action, doctrines, and motives

motives of obedience to the mere force and authority of reaſon, which were originally deduced from a very different ſource? Rules, indeed, doctrines and motives entirely agreeable to the perceptions and concluſions of reaſon, when previouſly made known to it by other means, but which it never could have diſcovered in ſo clear, diſtinct and ſatisfactory a manner by its own ſtrength; which, in fact, it never did diſcover by its own ſtrength, if any credit may be given to the moral hiſtory of mankind. The ſyſtem of faith and duty, which has been above delineated and recommended to us, ſay theſe impartial enquirers, we acknowledge to be, in all reſpects, conformable to the principles of human reaſon—to be indeed little leſs than ſtrictly demonſtrable by it: its foundations are ſo deeply laid in the nature of God himſelf, the nature of man, and the nature of things, that thoſe perſons are wholly without excuſe, who ſunk in inattention, indolence and indifference,

ference, uſe not their beſt endeavours to acquaint themſelves with it, and to act agreeably to it. But the intereſting queſtion, which we would humbly propoſe to be examined and decided, is, whether this ſyſtem of faith and duty be, in fact, the genuine offspring of unaſſiſted reaſon? or, whether it muſt not be aſcribed to a different ſource, to ſome higher and ſuperiour cauſe; that is, whether it owes not its origin to an immediate and extraordinary interpoſition of heaven in favour of mankind?

XXX. And this queſtion, ſay they, is the more neceſſary to be clearly determined, that we may the better know ourſelves, our real ſtrength and weakneſs; that we may not miſtake the object of our thanks and gratitude, and by looking up to reaſon, as ſufficient of itſelf to conduct us to our greateſt happineſs, make it the undeſerving idol of our adoration; whilſt we teach ourſelves, by degrees, to become leſs ſenſible of our immediate

and continual dependence upon the Deity for every thing that we now are, or expect to be hereafter. For as, on the one hand, we would not be thought to detract from the native brightneſs of that internal light, which was given by God himſelf to enlighten every man, who cometh into the world: ſo neither would we, by imputing too great a luſtre to it, contribute to leſſen the legiſlative authority of the Deity, to weaken his moral providence and government in the kingdoms of men, or to remove thoſe additional and more cogent motives of love, duty and obedience, which we ſhall think ourſelves, as his moſt highly-favoured creatures, obliged to pay to the divine laws, if, upon examination, it ſhould appear, that they were really communicated to us by an extraordinary interpoſition from heaven. Now to know what reaſon is able to effectuate in the great buſineſs of virtue and religion, and what is beyond its ſtrength to diſcover, though not to demonſtrate

monſtrate after it has been diſcovered by other means, we muſt conſult fact and experience, our beſt and only guides in reſearches of this kind; we muſt take an impartial view of the ſtate of morality in thoſe ages, when the world, probably, had no other light, but that of reaſon for its direction; and in thoſe nations, where, even to this day, there is no other principle to guide and influence their enquiries. For the queſtion is not, what reaſon, aided by ſupernatural information and inſtruction, may be able to comprehend, to underſtand, to explain and to inculcate; but what, in fact, it did comprehend, underſtand, explain and inculcate upon theſe important points, where it has been left entirely to itſelf and its own powers. Florid declamations upon the extenſiveneſs, ſufficiency and perfection of human reaſon will carry very little weight with them, when placed in the balance againſt the univerſal experi-

ence and obſervation of mankind, againſt undoubted matter of fact.

XXXI. If then, ſay they, natural reaſon, by its native and unaſſiſted force, had ſo clearly and evidently taught the being of one only God of eſſential power, wiſdom, holyneſs and goodneſs, the maker, lawgiver and governour of the univerſe, as has been above demonſtrated, and as we believe it; how came it to paſs, that the whole world both learned and unlearned, both civilized and barbarous, (the ſingle province of Judea excepted) fell at firſt into ſuch groſs errors concerning this fundamental principle, this angular ſtone, as it may be called, of all virtue and religion, and continued for ſo many ages in them? If we read the beſt and moſt authentick modern accounts of the untutored natives of Africa and America, we ſhall find whole countries, either without any notions at all of a Deity and his governing providence; or, at leaſt, poſſeſſed of ſuch unworthy, ridiculous

and

and abſurd ones, as are, perhaps, more derogatory from the excellence of the divine nature than none at all. Nor ſhall we change the gloomy ſcene much for the better in this reſpect, if we conſult the hiſtory of the polite Chineſe (as they are ſometimes, affectedly, called) or peruſe the ancient volumes of the more learned Greeks and Romans. For even amongſt theſe, the ſo-much-admired nations of the earth, we find polytheiſm and idolatry eſtabliſhed by law; we behold whole ſects of their deepeſt thinkers, and moſt contemplative philoſophers little better than avowed atheiſts; nor was there any thing ſo mean, impious and impure, which was not commonly reported, and by too many believed, concerning the numerous hoſt of their Gods. Nor will it, we preſume to think, be looked upon as a ſufficient reply to what has been here obſerved of the deplorable ignorance of mankind concerning the nature and attributes of the Deity, when left to them-

ſelves, to aſſert, that there have never been wanting in the world men of profound penetration, who ſaw into the errors of the popular religion, and who knew better than they thought it expedient either publickly to teach to others, or openly to practiſe themſelves: that there never have been wanting men who were well acquainted with the unity of the divine Being, and with other, the moſt important, truths relating to the almighty Maker of heaven and earth, though they thought it moſt prudent to cover and conceal ſuch kind of truths from the knowledge of the groſſer vulgar, for fear of incurring the enmity of a powerful prieſthood, and of drawing upon themſelves the vengeance of the civil magiſtrate. For can it poſſibly be conceived, that any perſon, who entertained ſuch right and worthy notions of the Deity, as is here ſuppoſed; namely, that he is a Being of all imaginable perfections, that he is but one, that religious worſhip, (the

worſhip

worſhip of ſpirit and truth,) is due only, and to be addreſſed to him alone; that he governs the univerſe by his Providence; that he is a rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him, and a puniſher of all thoſe who wilfully and unrepentingly break his laws—Can it be conceived, we aſk, that any perſon, who was once fully and clearly convinced of theſe intereſting points, would afterwards regularly conform to what he could not but look upon as the height of profaneneſs and impiety, and pay his daily adoration to ſtocks and ſtones and to an image made like unto corruptible man, merely becauſe he found idolatry preſcribed and eſtabliſhed by the laws of his country? whether it was right, in a caſe of this infinite moment and concern to hearken unto the magiſtate, rather than to render unto God the honour due unto his name, ſurely could be no very difficult matter for perſons of courage, underſtanding, piety and benevolence to determine. If

then the philoſophers, if the wiſe men amongſt the heathens had been, in fact, acquainted with the great and intereſting truths relating to the Deity, which have been above demonſtrated; muſt they not, in conſequence of this knowledge, have judged it their indiſpenſible duty to have owned and profeſſed them? muſt they not, at leaſt, have judged it their indiſpenſible duty not to have meanly contradicted, and counter-acted, theſe truths in every inſtance of their religious worſhip? As, therefore, they did not publickly own and profeſs them, but, on the contrary, uniformly perſiſted in paying their devotion to the creature rather than to the Creator, may we not ſafely conclude, (and is it not for the honour of the maſters of human reaſon that we ſhould conclude) that they, in fact, knew very little more concerning them than the reſt of their brethren?

XXXII. And as there appears, upon a careful examination of the remains of the wiſeſt

wiſeſt of the ancient gentile nations, to have been nothing of a truly-ſpiritual nature in their religious worſhip; no thankſgivings publickly paid to the Author of their being for the good things, which he had ſo freely and in ſuch abundance beſtowed upon them; no requeſts offered up for divine aſſiſtance in the future performance of their duty; no ſorrow for, nor acknowledgement of, paſt offences to God, as their maker, lawgiver and governour, nor prayers to him for forgiveneſs of their ſins—ſo likewiſe, ſay theſe impartial enquirers, do we find the concluſions of reaſon equally obſcure, confuſed, contradictory and unauthoritative, with regard to the chief end of man, and to the offices of mere humanity, ſuch as were undoubtedly oweing to their own preſervation and purity, and to the happineſs of their fellow-creatures. But even though we ſhould grant, (what cannot however be eaſily proved) that a complete ſyſtem or rule of religious morality

rality may poſſibly be collected and deduced from the ſcattered precepts diſperſed up and down in the many volumes of the ancient philoſophers, winnowed from their ſelf-contradictions—may we not, however, be permitted to aſk in our turn likewiſe, what is there in ſuch a collection to induce and perſuade the bulk of mankind (very incompetent judges of the force of abſtract reaſoning and refined ſpeculations) to receive it as a ſteady and uniform rule of action; to receive it as a divine law, which they muſt look upon themſelves as under a permanent and unalterable obligation to ſubmit to and obey, even when it moſt contradicts the gratification of their favourite appetites, paſſions and inclinations? In the ſyſtem of natural duty, as it has been above deſcribed, we ſee the foundation of religious and moral obligation deeply laid in the immutable nature, attributes and will of an infinitely-wiſe, all-powerful and benevolent

Being;

Being; but this was an authority never once thought of, an authority entirely wanting to give force, ſpirit and activity to the pagan ſchemes of virtue. Many excellent things, undoubtedly, were ſpoken by the Grecian Socrates; nor are the writings of the Chineſe Confucius deſtitute of noble maxims and exalted principles of moral conduct; but were Socrates and Confucius lawgivers of mankind, or did they ever pretend to offer any proofs of their divine miſſion? Who gave to them, or who gave to Plato, to Ariſtotle, or to Cicero authority to preſcribe laws to the reſt of their fellow-creatures? Had they permiſſion from the God of nature to ſay, *do this, and you ſhall live for ever?* As philoſophers, attentive to the voice of reaſon, their notions, principles and concluſions frequently extort our praiſe, and call for all our admiration; though at other times we cannot help being ſhocked at their miſtakes, and pitying their inequalities, inconſiſtencies, weakneſſes

neſſes and want of judgement. But ſtill their beſt notions, principles and dictates will be only looked upon as coming from men, liable, as all other men are, to ignorance and continual error; and, conſequently, the reſt of mankind will think themſelves entirely at liberty either to admit or to reject them, as ſuits their inclination; or, as they think them agreeable to their ſeveral lights, intereſts, paſſions, prejudices or humours. For what is there that can make the opinions of a mere philoſopher a duty to the reſt of the world, or render his precepts, as ſuch, morally obligatory? Splendid diſcourſes upon the native beauty, the intrinſick excellence, and the independent reaſonableneſs and fitneſs of virtue and religion, have been always experienced to be but little underſtood, and to make but a weak impreſſion upon the more ignorant, thoughtleſs and unattentive part of the human ſpecies, who are generally governed by the inſinuations of their ſenſes, rather than by the deductions of

reaſon;

reaſon; and who muſt have their paſſions rowſed to the uniform practice of moral obedience by the aſſurance of happineſs either preſent or future.

XXXIII. So again, ſay theſe impartial enquirers, if unaſſiſted reaſon had taught the important doctrines of the immortality of the human ſoul, and of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments in another life, in as clear, diſtinct and convincing a manner, as it has been deduced above: how came it to paſs, that the whole pagan world fell into ſuch terrible errors, and were guilty of ſuch groſs ſuperſtitions upon points ſo eſſential to the intereſts of morality and religion? And what ſufficient cauſe can be aſſigned, why its wiſeſt beſt men had ſo much difficulty to perſuade themſelves and others, or rather never were able to find arguments fully to ſatisfy themſelves, of its certainty, and of the nature of that happineſs and miſery, which ſhould be connected with it? We would not, however, be thought to

aſſert, that the heathens knew nothing at all of another life after this: but our meaning is, that thoſe nations which now have, and which formerly had, reaſon only for their direction in matters of religion (the inquiſitive Greeks and Romans in particular) had not ſuch a notion of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, as has been above deſcribed, and which could be of the leaſt ſervice to them in confirmation and ſupport of their morality. For whilſt it was generally taught amongſt them, and, by the vulgar at leaſt, as generally credited, that a happy and glorious immortality had been ſometimes conferred upon the moſt cruel, wicked, impure and flagitious of mortals; nay, that even their deities themſelves had been guilty of the moſt abominable and deteſtable crimes, what good effects was it poſſible for ſuch a notion of a future ſtate to produce upon the minds and behaviour of its believers? Could the poets, lawgivers and philoſophers, the divines

of

of ancient times, reaſonably expect, that the people would endeavour to be better, or more virtuous than their heroes or gods themſelves had been? But even though it ſhould be granted, that ſome few of the heathen philoſophers had been able to argue with ſo much juſtice from the nature of man, from Gods righteous government of the world and from univerſal tradition, as to ſatisfy themſelves of the immortality of their ſouls, and of the certainty of a future ſtate of retribution: yet could they not, we think, draw any concluſions from hence, which would aſſuredly conduct them to ſolid peace and a well-grounded tranquillity of mind; they could draw no concluſions from their knowledge of a future judgement, which would not tend to fill them with anxiety and uneaſineſs, rather than with pleaſure. For as they could not but be conſcious, that, in many inſtances, they had voluntarily tranſgreſſed the law of their being, had acted contrary to the dictates of right reaſon pointing

pointing out their duty to them, and had paid no regard to the eſſential difference of good and evil as founded in the nature of things, upon what ground could they flatter themſelves, that a Being of infinite wiſdom, holyneſs and juſtice, that the guardian of univerſal order would be throughly reconciled to them, would pity their frailty, forgive their iniquities, and reward their imperfect obedience with eternal happineſs? They might, indeed, have recourſe to repentance and amendment of life, as the moſt probable means to avert the ſeverity of the divine anger, (though they ſeem to have had very little notion of that neceſſary part of true repentance, which conſiſts in a ſincere ſorrow for paſt tranſgreſſions) and endeavour to be more punctual hereafter in the diſcharge of their duty: but how far this alone would operate towards blotting out the guilt of crimes already committed, and towards reſtoring them to the entire favour of their ſovereign lawgiver and judge, without

out ſome previous proviſion made for vindicating the authority of his government and laws, they could not, we think, with certainty conclude from any principles of right reaſon, which they appear to have been acquainted with.

XXXIV. We readily grant, indeed, that mankind were never obliged to practiſe, what no diligence of their own could previouſly inform them of; we readily grant, that the human duty can not be more extenſive, than are the ways of knowing it, and that every one ſhall be accepted, in the final day of account, according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not—But this is not the queſtion before us, at preſent; nor are we now enquiring, whether the right uſe of reaſon has not always been able to preſerve thoſe, who had this principle only for their guide in religious matters, from falling into miſery, and, thro' the infinite mercy and goodneſs of their Maker, to confer, perhaps, ſome inferiour

degrees of happineſs upon them—but we are to decide, whether reaſon, without any extraordinary aſſiſtance from heaven, can deduce a complete and perfect rule of religious faith and practice, and by that means be able, of itſelf, to exalt its votaries to that higheſt degree of happineſs, which the God of nature made them capable of attaining. And this point, ſay theſe devout enquirers, we preſume to think, has been clearly determined in the negative by the impartial view, which we have given of the ſtate of morality and religion amongſt the wiſeſt nations of the ancient world. And ſhould any one ſtill deny or doubt the truth of our concluſion, let him turn his eyes to the uninſtructed tribes in the north of America, or the ſouth of Africa, and then ingenuouſly anſwer himſelf, whether he thinks that theſe people are as completely happy at preſent, and have as good a proſpect of continuing ſo in a future ſtate, as if they were furniſhed with juſt and worthy

appre-

apprehenſions of the ſupreme Being and his ſuper-intending providence, and felt all that high and pleaſing ſenſation, which is experienced to ariſe in the human breaſt from the conſciouſneſs of acting agreeably to the extenſive laws of moral rectitude, and of fully diſcharging their duty to their God, their fellow-creatures and themſelves? He who thinks they are, if ſuch a perſon there be, will find little difficulty to perſuade himſelf farther, that there is no real difference between the human and the brute ſpecies, but in their ſeveral gradations of inſtinct; that all things are matter and motion, and governed by blind chance and undiſcerning fate; and that happineſs conſiſts merely in freedom from pain, and in the indulgence of the ſenſual appetites. As to the reſt, ſay theſe humble, reaſonable and modeſt enquirers, namely, why man was not originally created more perfect; why he was ſuffered to continue ſo many ages in ignorance of the means of being

completely happy; and why ſo conſiderable a part of mankind are ſtill permitted to lye in darkneſs and the ſhadow of death — Theſe are arduous points which we confeſs ourſelves utterly unable to ſolve, and therefore do we willingly leave them to the conſummate wiſdom of that almighty Being, who, we know, always does what is beſt for the good of the whole, whoſe mercy is over all his works, and in whoſe diſpenſations, with the moſt humble reſignation, we dutifully acquieſce.

XXXV. Thus far theſe devout and unprejudiced ſearchers after truth—and moſt undeniable are the facts, as they have been here ſtated, at large, in their words and arguments. Eighteen hundred years are not fully elapſed, ſince the whole world, (the deſpiſed province of Judea, ſingly, excepted) were polytheiſts and idolaters; ignorant, in general, of the unity of God and his perfections; of the end of man and his chief

good;

good; of the ſpiritual worſhip due to the Deity, and of the true foundation of moral and religious obligation: nor were they more certain of the concern, which divine Providence took in the government of mankind; or of the exiſtence of that future and ſpiritual ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, which has ſuch a mighty efficacy to give weight to religious inſtructions, and to aſſiſt reaſon in balancing the paſſions, and in diſcharge of duty.—And is it not amazing, that a ſyſtem of moral principles and precepts; that a rule of religious faith and practice, which appears to us, at preſent, ſo convincingly to flow from our notions of God, and from the conſtitution and nature of things, ſhould have been either wholly unknown to thoſe nations, who had reaſon only for their guide in theſe matters; or, at beſt, believed by them and profeſſed in ſo dark, perplexed and uninfluencing a manner, as to be, in many inſtances, prejudicial to

the cauſe of virtue, rather than of any ſervice to it? And how ſhall we attempt to give a ſatisfactory account of this ſurpriſing appearance in the rational world; namely, of the clearneſs, preciſion and ſuperiority of our knowledge, to that of all the ancient and modern heathens, upon the moſt important and intereſting ſubjects, which can engage our attention and enquiry? Were, then, the powers of the human mind, in the earlier ages of the world, weaker and more imperfect than they are now experienced to be? Certainly not. The faculty of reaſon in mankind was the ſame formerly, as it is now; and it is education only and better inſtruction, which diſtinguiſh the politer parts of the earth from the more uncivilized and barbarous nations. Mankind in all ages, and in all climates, as far as we have been able to carry our reſearches, ſeem to have been always endued with the ſame ſhare of natural ſenſe, and to have been ever capable of making the

ſame advances in ſcience with the ſame information and means of improvement. Wiſdom and prudence and cunning are now what they formerly were; nor can this age ſhew human nature in any one character exalted beyond the examples, which antiquity has left us. Can we produce greater inſtances of civil and political wiſdom, than are to be found in the governments of Greece and Rome? Are not the civil laws of Rome ſtill had in admiration? And have they not a place allowed them ſtill in almoſt all our weſtern kingdoms. But reaſon, perhaps, is more cultivated now, than it was eighteen hundred years ago, and moral ſubjects attended to and examined with greater aſſiduity and diligence!—Neither does this appear. On the contrary; the various ſects of philoſophers both in the eaſt and weſt, amongſt the Greeks eſpecially) were continually meditating, diſcourſing and writing

upon theſe intereſting topicks, and their moral tracts are, many ſo them, extant even to this day—And what do they teach us, but to admire the ſtrength of genius in their authors, to applaud their induſtry and application, and, at the ſame time, to pity their ignorance upon ſome of the moſt eſſential doctrines of religion, their frequent contradictions upon others, and their obſcurity and want of authority upon all? What could have been performed by the mere ſtrength of unaſſiſted reaſon upon the great ſubject of morality, might have been juſtly expected from the continual meditations and labours of a Socrates, a Plato, an Ariſtotle, or a Tully: nor can we ſuppoſe, without being guilty of an abſurd partiality, that the moſt profound, inquiſitive and ſtrongeſt thinkers amongſt the moderns would have been able to have gone farther by their own ſtrength, or have been more ſucceſsful in their moral enquiries, and in extirpating idolatry,

idolatry, than the moſt curious, penetrating and ſtudious ſpirits of antiquity. *

XXXVI. From whence, then, had we our religious wiſdom; and to what new appearance in the intellectual world do we owe thoſe ſuperiour degrees of light and knowledge, which ſo eſſentially diſtinguiſh the preſent delineations of the religion of nature from the beſt ſyſtems of morality framed either by the ancient philoſophers, or by the moſt thoughtful and ingenious of the modern heathen nations? The anſwer is as true, as it is obvious to every competent and impartial enquirer — We have advantages which they had not; we received our religious wiſdom by written tradition from the land of Judea; it was communicated unto us by God himſelf, in an extraordinary manner, through the intervention of Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles. In the midſt of thoſe ſurrounding clouds of ignorance, obſcurity and confuſion, which

* *Biſhop of Londons Diſcourſes*, vol. 1.

had

had overſhadowed almoſt the whole ancient world, and which the utmoſt efforts of human reaſon had, in vain, endeavoured to diſpel, a light ſprang up at once, which has ſince diffuſed its brightneſs over a conſiderable part of the globe. That perfect ſcheme of religion and moral duty, which we now ſo much admire and ſo confidently make our boaſt of, as if it had been the work of our own labour and penetration; that additional and authoritative inſtruction, of which Socrates is reported ſo feelingly to have expreſſed his deſire, and which was certainly wanting to teach mankind the beſt and ſureſt way to obtain their greateſt happineſs, is found entire in the records of the New Teſtament. In thoſe volumes, the whole religion of reaſon and nature, which, before their publication, had been either buried in ignorance, or obſcured by inconſiſtent oral traditions, or overwhelmed under the affected jargon of conceited philoſophers, is plainly diſcovered,

covered, laid open before us, and explained. In thoſe books, life and immortality are taught with all the clearneſs, preciſion and authority, which ſo leading and intereſting a doctrine calls for. The ſolid ſanctions of virtue and religion are there immoveably fixed; and the motives offered to encourage us to perform our whole duty, and to render ourſelves worthy of thoſe joys, which are to be found in the more immediate preſence of God, are made as ſtrong and forcible, as is compatible with the freedom of moral action: and there, alſo, are we ſhewed, to the inexpreſſible comfort and ſatisfaction of all good men, by what efficacious means God reconciles himſelf to ſinners, blotting out the guilt of their paſt tranſgreſſions, and reſtoring them to his own favour, and to the certainty of a bleſſed eternity.

XXXVII. And as we are not obliged either to the force of our own penetration, or to our progreſſive improvement upon

upon what the great maſters of human reaſon have felt behind them, for the pre-eminence, which we ſo clearly enjoy over the whole heathen world in matters relating to the divine nature and religion, but to the books of the New Teſtament: ſo neither did the authors of theſe books owe the inſtructions, with which they have ſo greatly contributed to the improvement of mankind, to their own meditations and ſuperiour ſkill in the art of reaſoning, but they unanimouſly profeſſed to ſpeak the words of their maſter Jeſus Chriſt, and of him only; they delivered his doctrines and precepts; in his name their diſcourſes were publiſhed, and by his commiſſion and authority they undertook, what the wiſdom of philoſophy never ſo much as thought of undertaking, the arduous taſk of reforming a corrupted and idolatrous world, and of ſubſtituting a new and perfect religion in the place of popular error and ſuperſtition. From whence then had Jeſus

Chriſt

Chriſt that extraordinaay wiſdom, which is ſo eminently diſplayed in the writings of his apoſtles? He himſelf expreſsly tells us, that he came into the world in the name of God, being ſent by him to do and declare his will; that he did nothing of himſelf; and that all things which he ſaid and did, he received from him, who ſent him. And it is, I think, impoſſible not to give the moſt unreſerved credit to what he thus relates to us with reſpect to this important point. For from what other fountain could ſuch wonderful knowledge have been originally derived? He muſt have received his information either from the learned labours and inſtitutions of his own countrymen; or from the inſtructions and writings of foreign nations; or, it muſt have been, as he explicitly and uniformly aſſures us it was, ſupernatural and communicated to him immediately from the Father of light and truth. For we cannot be ſo extravagantly abſurd as to maintain, that he was ſelf-

taught;

taught; that he owed his wiſdom to his own reflections and meditations entirely; and that uninformed and uninſtructed merely-human-reaſon was by its own ſtrength, and without any external aſſiſtance whatever, able to go beyond the united penetration both of the eaſtern and weſtern world. Did he, then, receive his ſuperiour wiſdom upon the ſubject of religion from the precepts and inſtitutions of his own countrymen? from the commentaries of the rabbins, and the ſpeculations of the doctors of the law? A moments attention will convince every competent judge, that this ſuppoſition is entirely improbable and unſatisfactory. The Jews, it is confeſſed on all hands, were a remarkably ignorant people in matters of thought and ſcience—ſlaves to the ſeveral ſects and parties, into which they were divided, enemies to all ingenuous liberty of thinking, bigots to their own opinions, and ſteddily perſiſting in the ſingular cuſtoms of their forefathers, which

which they fondly imagined were never to be aboliſhed, they deſpiſed, and, in their turn, were equally contemned by all the reſt of the world. Their religion, indeed, ſuch as it had been originally tranſmitted to them in the writings of their lawgiver Moſes, had taught them the unreaſonableneſs of idolatry, and fully inſtructed them in the belief of the one true God: nor were the more conſiderable branches of the moral duties unknown to *their law*, though theſe latter, at the time we are ſpeaking of, were become a dead letter, and rendered of little effect, by that heap of vain and uſeleſs oral-traditions, which their prevailing ſect had profanely introduced in their ſtead. The wiſdom of Chriſt was of a kind quite different from that of the ſcribes and phariſees, and as far ſuperiour to it, as the inſtructions, which his apoſtles gave their followers, were more excellent than the burdenſome and futile, not to ſay immoral, traditions, which the wiſe men among

among the Jews had made the foundation of their exhortations to the people.

XXXVIII. But might not Chriſts wiſdom have been tranſmitted to him from foreign countries? Might not the contemplative Magi, Bramins, or Gnoſticks; might not the famous philoſophers of Greece and Rome have been his guides and inſtructors in divine matters? Might he not have improved his notions from hints which had been originally conveyed to him in their works? The ſhorteſt examination will evince, that this hypotheſis is even more inconcluſive, than that which we have been conſidering and refuting. For (to ſay nothing of the little correſpondence, either literary or religious, which was, at this time, carried on between the Jewiſh nation and the reſt of the world) can it, with the leaſt appearance of probability, be imagined, that Jeſus Chriſt, the ſon of a poor illiterate mechanick, uneducated, without ſo much as the knowledge of the firſt elements of literature,

literature, ſhould be able to deduce his wiſdom from authorities ſo profound and abſtruſe? Read with attention the writings of the moſt celebrated authors of the ages preceding Chriſt, either the fragments of the oriental ſages, or the more laboured volumes of weſtern learning, and you will want no other arguments to convince you, that the pure and unmixed ſtreams, which run through the doctrines and precepts of the books of the New Teſtament, could not poſſibly have been derived from fountains ſo turbid and corrupt. Could, for example, the unaffected ſimplicity of that ſpiritual worſhip, which is contained in the records of the goſpel, have been borrowed from the myſterious obſcurity of the Egyptian wiſdom, or collected from the extravagant reveries, and whimſical ſuperſtitions of the Magi, Gymnoſophiſts and Gnoſticks? or could the unity of God, his incommunicable and ſpiritual nature, be learned from the writings of an Ariſtotle, a Varro, or

a Tully, all of them groſs idolaters in their own practice, and encouragers of the ſame impiety in the books, which they made publick for the information and improvement of mankind? The precepts of Chriſt are undeniably more perfective of the human nature; his promiſes more certain and explicit; his rewards more deſirable; and his inſtitutions, in every reſpect, more pious, uſeful and beneficial to mankind, than either the hypocritical auſterities of the phariſees, or the gloomy rites and abſtractions of the orientaliſts, or the moſt admired laws of the moſt admired lawgivers of Greece or Rome. Let us take Confucius, Zoroaſter, Socrates, Plato, or the greateſt moraliſt that ever lived without the light of the goſpel, and it will appear, that their beſt ſyſtems of moral inſtruction were intermixed and blended with ſo much ſuperſtition, and ſo many groſs abſurdities, as quite eluded and defeated the main deſign of them. *

* *Moral Philoſopher*, Vol. I.

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In Chriſts diſcourſes no views of ſelf-intereſt appear, no ſchemes of popular ambition are carried on, nor any particular vice indulged under the ſpecious pretence of the publick good; but all is uniformly and conſiſtently pure and holy, grave and ſerious, ſolemn and devout, without the leaſt tincture of ſuperſtition, vanity or oſtentation; all is plain, ſimple and obvious to the poor as well as the rich, to the vulgar as well as the philoſopher —— From whence then had this man this wiſdom? A queſtion of this leading importance can ſcarcely be too often propoſed, or too maturely conſidered and examined. Human wiſdom, we know by experience, is not to be acquired, but by diligently applying the heart to ſearch and to ſeek it out; but by much labour and induſtry, by long ſtudy and an unwearied attention of the mind to the ſubject of our enquiry. For we can no more be wiſe and learned, than we can be virtuous by inſtinct. But Chriſt was

utterly deſtitute of all ſuch ſort of aſſiſtances, of all the common and ordinary methods of improvement. This is univerſally confeſſed; he was reproached for it by the taunting and offended Galileans, who were beſt acquainted with him, and perfectly well knew his manner of life from his youth upwards. His fellow-citizens and neighbours frequently upbraid him, that he had had no education; that he had never applied himſelf to reading, that he had not been even initiated into the firſt elements of literature — Nevertheleſs both his own countrymen and foreigners; both friends and enemies; both learned and unlearned all ſtand aſtoniſhed at the excellent ſpirit, with which he was endued, and which has worked ſuch a wonderful revolution in the moral and religious world ſince his time. Can we then make a thoughtful and ſerious doubt, can we really be at a loſs to know, from whence he had that wiſdom, which he communicated to his

his diſciples in ſo ample a manner; and from them has been tranſmitted to us? *It muſt have been extraordinary and ſupernatural; it muſt have originally deſcended from heaven; it muſt have been derived to him, immediately, from the everlaſting fountain of knowledge and wiſdom.*

XXXIX. But a point of this fundamental importance to the intereſt of true religion muſt not be lightly paſſed over; and an event, ſo much out of the common and uſual courſe of divine Providence, as this is ſuppoſed to be, calls for the moſt wary, cautious and accurate examination, before it be either haſtily admitted, or raſhly rejected. If God almighty really has made known his will to mankind by an expreſs revelation communicated to Chriſt and his apoſtles, as they pretend, and as we cannot but think extremely probable from what has been already obſerved—This is a matter of fact, and, notwithſtanding all the preſumptive evidence which may be offered in its fa-

vour, muſt be proved, as all other facts, before they are admitted to be true, are proved, by its own genuine and proper evidence. As reaſonable creatures, having received all things from God, and hoping all things from his power, juſtice and goodneſs, we profeſs ourſelves ready to follow the unerring guidance of the divine will, through whatever difficulties and diſcouragements it may lead our careful ſteps. Only we would be fully convinced, that the ſtar, which we are to purſue as our conductor, be really of heavenly origin, and not one of thoſe blazing meteors, thoſe earth-born flames, which, after hurrying the aſtoniſhed traveller over bogs and precipices, leaves him, at laſt, farther from his deſtined home, than when he firſt ſet out upon his journey.

XL. Thus, then, may we ſafely argue upon this important ſubject without fear of being miſled either by the warmth of our own imaginations, or the deluſions of crafty impoſtors, or the credulity of ſelf-

ſelf-deceived enthuſiaſts. Should God almighty, either out of his abundant goodneſs to his reaſonable creatures, or to anſwer ſome other wiſe purpoſe of his ſovereign adminiſtration, vouchſafe at any time to make a larger and more expreſs diſcovery of his will to them, than they have, in fact, collected for themſelves from the ſyſtem of nature and general conſtitution of things; ſuch new diſcovery muſt be made either immediately to every individual of every age and nation, of whom it ſhall be required to pay a regard to this will: or it muſt be made to ſome particular perſon or perſons, with commiſſion to them, that they afterwards communicate it to all ſuch perſons, as may be any ways concerned to know and obey it. That the firſt of theſe methods has not been taken; and that God almighty has not thought fit to interrupt the ordinary courſe of his Providence by making a particular diſcovery of his will to every individual, we can want no other

argument to convince us, than our own proper experience. If then ſuch revelation has been, in fact, ever given to mankind, it muſt have been by the ſecond of theſe methods; namely, by divine communications made to ſome particular perſon or perſons. Now that the author of nature can, in the extraordinary manner here ſuppoſed, if he ſhould ſo pleaſe, communicate his will to his rational creatures, cannot ſeriouſly be doubted, there being nothing in ſuch a ſuppoſition repugnant either to the attributes of the divine Being on the one hand, or to the nature of man on the other. For if it be in the human power diſtinctly to convey our ſentiments and notions to each other; and, in our mutual wants, to comfort and aſſiſt each other with information, advice and inſtruction, ſhall not that Being, who is every where preſent, who knows whereof the underſtanding is made, and is intimately acquainted with the beſt means of exciting and im-

preſſing ideas and notions upon our ſoul, be able to do the ſame? Shall not he be able, if it be agreeable to the gracious purpoſes of his wiſe adminiſtration, to give to his creatures a particular information either of ſuch truths, as they could not have diſcovered by means of their natural faculties; or of ſuch truths, as they could, perhaps, have diſcovered, tho' not without much labour; or which, in fact, he might foreknow they never would have diſcovered, if left to themſelves? But if it be not a thing impoſſible in itſelf, as evidently it is not, for God almighty to reveal his will to his rational creatures; then nothing can be more certain, than that the perſons, who ſhall be favoured with theſe divine communications, may be aſſured by the ſtrongeſt and moſt irreſiſtible evidence, that it is God himſelf, whom they feel ſpeaking to them, and that they are not miſled by the mere force of their perſuaſion, and the ardour of an over-lively fancy. For unleſs the perſons,

perſons, to whom ſuch revelations may chance to be made, are able clearly to diſtinguiſh the divine impreſſions from all natural motions and operations whatever, and can be convinced of this eſſential circumſtance without a poſſibility of miſtake, the divine interpoſition will be uſeleſs entirely and vain; and as well might no revelation at all have been made to them—nor will they ever be able to ſatisfy either themſelves or others in a rational manner, that they have not miſtaken the groundleſs workings of their own over-heated imaginations for celeſtial influence and inſpiration.

XLI. Without perplexing ourſelves, therefore, with nicely-intricate queſtions concerning the ſpecifick nature and various degrees of inſpiration; or about the manner, in which the divine Power operates upon the human mind; or whether a man ought to be looked upon as a free agent, whilſt he is under the influence of the heavenly communication—thus far

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do we own ourſelves to be fully convinced, and to theſe propoſitions, as to ſo many undoubted truths, are we reſolved to adhere in all their conſequences; namely, *that God almighty can reveal his will to mankind, in an extraordinary manner, by the inſtrumentality of one or more perſons, ſhould he, at any time, think proper to do ſo—that the perſons favoured with theſe revelations may be aſſured, beyond a poſſibility of doubt, that they are derived to them from the Father of light and truth*—and, *that theſe revelations may be ſo deeply inſcribed upon the memories of the perſons, to whom they ſhall have been made, that they ſhall not be able either to forget or miſtake them, ſhould they be commiſſioned to communicate to other people what has been thus diſcovered to them.* The point, therefore, which claims the next place in our matureſt conſideration and diſcuſſion, is, by what arguments other perſons (thoſe, I mean, to whom the revelation may afterwards be related in order to influence their religious

gious conduct) may be convinced beyond the power of rational doubt, that he, who ſpeaks to them, is really an inſpired teacher ſent from God. The great point, I ſay, which we are now concerned moſt carefully to enquire into, is, *what evidence we have a right to call for and to expect, before we give our full aſſent and obedience to what ſhall be delivered to us under the high character of coming immediately from heaven.* In a caſe of this very intereſting and very extraordinary nature, we ought not to acquieſce in any evidence, which is not the ſtrongeſt and moſt deciſive, which the queſtion in debate will admit. And unleſs we act in this reſerved, prudent and cautious manner; unleſs we apply the infallible touchſtone of reaſon and argument, before we acknowledge the pretenſions of the perſon claiming to be inſpired, and reſign our underſtanding to his doctrines, we ſhall never be able clearly to determine, whether our inſtructor himſelf (hurried away

by

by the warmth of his imagination, and not knowing how to diſtinguiſh between realities and appearances) may not have been deceived; or whether, conſcious of the impoſture, he may not have put on the maſk of ſanctity, and abuſed the name of God, the more ſecurely to carry on a ſcheme of knavery, and to prey upon the credulity of his fellow-creatures.

XLII. For theſe reaſons, whoever cometh to us in the name of the moſt high God, pretending to have received an extraordinary commiſſion from him, (whether it be to publiſh doctrines entirely new, or to explain any former revelation, or, in general, to reform the religious principles and notions of the world,) we have an unqueſtionable right to call for the *proper* credentials; to examine them with the utmoſt rigour and exactneſs, and to be abſolutely ſatisfyed of their force and authenticity, before we ſurrender our faith to what he advances. Is, then, *the mere ſtrength of perſuaſion in*

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the prophet himſelf the credentials, which we are enquiring after, and evidence ſufficient to direct us in a matter, wherein our greateſt happineſs is ſo nearly concerned? If ſo, by what rule ſhall we be able effectually to diſtinguiſh between the reveries of fanaticks, and the genuine revelations of heaven; between the ſalutary ſuggeſtions of the Father of light and truth, and the zealous fervors of a heart over-charged with devotion? If confidence of aſſertion might be allowed as a ſatisfactory argument, that a doctrine comes immediately from God, the moſt contradictory propoſitions would have an equal title to paſs for celeſtial illuminations, and to be revered as of divine authority. For there is ſcarcely an opinion ſo abſurd, or practice ſo unreaſonable and extravagant, which ſome one or other has not pretended, with all the vehemence of the moſt ardent enthuſiaſm, to ſanctify by a particular warrant from heaven. *Shall then the holyneſs, auſterity, innocence*

and

and rigid regularity of the life of our inſtructor be urged as an inconteſtible proof, that the divine Spirit, in a peculiar manner, breathes within him? But this evidence, cogent as it may appear to be at firſt view, will be found altogether deceitful, when tried in the accurate balance of reaſon, and not worthy the value, which has been too often put upon it. For as there is no neceſſary connection between the behaviour of a free agent, and the principles which he really maintains, and doctrines which he believes, our teacher, notwithſtanding appearances, may poſſibly be an hypocrite; at leaſt, we cannot be certain that he is not, unleſs we had the knowledge of that Being, from whom alone no ſecrets are hid. Pride, vanity, ſelf-intereſt and a fondneſs for being known, talked of and diſtinguiſhed from the herd of mankind, may be the real deities, whom he ſerves and adores, and from whom all his boaſted inſpiration is derived. At beſt, a man

may

may be very good, and lead a righteous, ſober and religious life, and yet be no prophet, nor have any right, as ſuch, to make innovations in the faith and practice of the reſt of the world. Nor will *the newneſs of any doctrine, its excellency, reaſonableneſs and conſiſtency* be ever regarded by thoſe, who underſtand the power and propriety of evidence, as the true and deciſive proof, that what is taught was diſcovered to the author, or propagator of it, by an immediate revelation from heaven. For much ſtudy, contemplation, diligence in enquiry, a peculiar felicity of genius, and even hazard may ſometimes throw a man upon certain truths both in the natural and moral world, which were before thought to have been beyond the reach of the human faculties. As little will deep and curious metaphyſical diſſertations upon the divine nature and attributes, to prove that it is ſuitable to the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Creator of the univerſe to

make

make known his whole will to mankind by an expreſs revelation; or merely moral arguments to ſhew the uſefulneſs and expediency of ſuch a revelation; or dubious conjectures upon the neceſſity of it, relatively to ourſelves, be ſubmitted to as clear and deciſive proofs, that God has really, in this manner, ever diſcovered his will to mankind: unleſs in ſupport and confirmation of ſuch reaſoning *a priori* (which ſhould never be applied to contingent events, but with the utmoſt caution) there be ſuper-added the only adequate, ſufficient and uncontrovertible evidence, which can be offered in a caſe ſo extraordinary, as this before us, even *the infallible teſtimony of God himſelf.* For as the primitive religion of mankind was founded in the original ſyſtem and conſtitution of things; no addition, diminution nor alteration ought to be made in it, but by the ſame divine authority, which eſtabliſhed the laws of nature,

and bad mankind to collect from them their duty and moral obligation.

XLIII. That all things are poſſible to the Author and Lord of the univerſe, which imply not ſelf-contradiction, we know, for certain, from the contemplation of his attributes; nor are we leſs aſſured, that as he made and conſtituted the order of nature, ſo he can, at any time, change, alter or ſuſpend it, if ever the important purpoſes of his moral government ſhould require him to do ſo. As, therefore, it has not pleaſed him to reveal his will immediately to ourſelves; if we are to believe that he has had this condeſcenſion for other perſons, and are really intereſted in the ſubject of the divine revelation, we may hope, from that eſſential rectitude which governs all his actions, that he will give us the higheſt poſſible evidence that he has done ſo; we may reaſonably expect, that he will enable the perſon, who addreſſes us in his

his words, to ſhew ſome effectual ſign of his inſpiration, to perform ſome extraordinary work, (or miracle, as it is uſually called) ſomething above and beyond the uſual power of ſecond cauſes to produce. For this is a teſtimony, which is not equivocal; it is a language, which cannot be miſunderſtood; it is a language, which no being, but God himſelf, can be ſuppoſed to ſpeak. Let therefore the prophet, who comes to us in the name of the Lord, do ſome great thing before us; ſomething, which the utmoſt efforts of human wiſdom, power or artifice cannot be conceived capable of doing; let the divine ſpirit bear witneſs to the high authority which he claims, by enabling him, upon this occaſion, to controul the eſtabliſhed laws and order of Providence—and, behold! all our prejudices are vaniſhed at once, as miſts before the riſing ſun! our natural incredulity is removed; our attention is wholly fixed upon what he is about to deliver,

and we are prepared to believe with the moſt profound reverence, and with the moſt entire ſubmiſſion to obey, the infallible meſſage which he brings. Doctrines thus circumſtanced and ſupported are Gods doctrines; words thus confirmed are the words of truth; and faith thus founded is divine, and not human faith. We believe the ſacred meſſenger not for his own ſake and upon the ſtrength of his own evidence, but upon the authority of that omnipotent Being, who, by permitting, conſenting or commanding him to work ſuch wondrous works, not only bears teſtimony to his veracity, but, at the ſame time, gives a ſanction likewiſe to the weight and importance of his meſſage.

XLIV. Thus, then, may the contemporaries of the inſpired perſon be convinced of his divine miſſion beyond a poſſibility of rational doubt; thoſe of them, I mean, who have the evidence of his mighty works before their own eyes in proof

proof of the truth of his doctrines, and of the ſupernatural power which animates and directs his words and actions. But what ſhall the reſt of his countrymen do in this caſe, and how ſhall more diſtant nations conduct themſelves, who may, perhaps, be equally intereſted in the matter of the inſpiration, and yet have no opportunity either of converſing with the prophet himſelf, or of beholding his miracles? Is there no way of ſatisfying them, likewiſe, of the divine authority of the teacher; of removing their ſcruples upon this moſt intereſting point, and of fixing their faith upon a reaſonable foundation? Certainly there is. For if the prophet has really worked miracles in the ſight of many people (as he is here ſuppoſed to have done) this is a matter of fact, and, conſequently, capable of being proved, as all other matters of fact are, by the evidence of ſuch perſons, as were eye-witneſſes of them. For, whether we ſee the miracles performed with

our own eyes, or are fully convinced that they were performed by the concurrent and uncontradicted teſtimony of a ſufficient number of other people, whom either curioſity or other motives had diſpoſed to ſee and enquire into them, the concluſions from ſuch conviction will be exactly the ſame in both caſes; namely, that they were worked with the approbation and permiſſion of God for ſome important purpoſes of his moral government; that the perſon or perſons impowered to perform them were divinely authoriſed to do ſo; and that the doctrines delivered by them in the name of the Moſt High, and confirmed, as above, under the ſeal of heaven, have a rightful claim to be acknowledged, believed and obeyed as coming directly from him. The ſingle point, therefore, which we want to be entirely ſatisfied in, is, that the miracles have been actually performed—And can we not have ſuch entire ſatisfaction, unleſs we behold the prophet with our own

eyes;

eyes; unleſs we ourſelves ſee him controuling the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, and interrupting the regular courſe of Providence? Undoubtedly we may. For human teſtimony, by the acknowledgement of all mankind, may be ſo circumſtanced, as to produce infallible aſſurance, or an evidence ſo ſtrong, as none but a fool or madman would doubt of it; and this aſſent to teſtimony or to the experience of other perſons, hath its foundation in the nature of things; in the conſtitution of the world and mankind. Philoſophers, indeed, and perſons of much abſtraction may call in queſtion the reports of their own ſenſes, and from an affectation of deeper thought and a more profound penetration than the reſt of their fellow-creatures, may pretend to deny, that we can be ſure of the exiſtence of any thing in the world, but of ourſelves, or, at beſt, of any thing but what falls immediately within our own experience. But their refined and ſubtle ſpeculations will have

very little effect upon the ſerious, unprejudiced and practical part of mankind, who will no more doubt of the reality of a fact, which is invariably atteſted to them by a proper number of honeſt and competent eye-witneſſes, whoſe evidence ſtands uncontradicted, than if it had fallen under the immediate cognizance of their own ſenſes. To argue, therefore, againſt well-ſupported authority, or external evidence in general, as a proper medium of faith and practice, is to endeavour to deſtroy one of the beſt informers of the human reaſon. The moſt extenſive knowledge of the wiſeſt man is confined within a very narrow compaſs, and would be ſtill more limited and reſtrained, were he left intirely to his own experience, and to the deductions of his own underſtanding. We ſee frequently with other peoples eyes, we hear with their ears, and truſt the report of their ſenſes, almoſt as much as we do that of our own, and act agreeably thereto; and it is highly

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reaſonable to do ſo, or, in many caſes, we ſhould not be able to act at all—The utmoſt that common ſenſe requires, is, that every thing propoſed to the underſtanding ſhould be accompanied with ſuch proofs, as the nature of it can furniſh. He who requires more is guilty of abſurdity, he who demands leſs of raſhneſs.

XLV. But here, perhaps, it may be ſuggeſted, that miracles are facts of ſuch a nature, as, having never fallen under our own inſpection and experience, are, for that reaſon, incapable of being proved; and therefore not to be credited, even though they ſhould be affirmed by the moſt ſeemingly-full, ſtrong and unexceptionable evidence, which can be offered by other people. Are we then to believe nothing, with regard to paſt facts, but what we perceive to be exactly conformable to our own previous obſervation and experience, and where the connection between cauſe and effect has been formerly diſcerned by

by our own ſenſes? But ſhould this be admitted, as the only true and proper ſtandard or criterion of credibility, it will be ſo far from being a certain guide to direct the meaſure of human faith, that it will be ever varying, as the experience of thoſe varies, to whoſe belief the events are propoſed. For all perſons have not equal opportunities of obſerving and examining the ſame things, and an event may be familiar to ſome men, which was never heard of by others. Upon this general principle, that nothing, which is contradictory to our own uniform and unalterable experience, can be the object of our belief, even events plainly deducible from the laws of nature, and which are to be accounted for upon mechanical principles, will be excluded from being credible, as well as miracles; nor can any evidence be ſufficient to convince the inhabitants of the torrid zone, (however certain the fact is in itſelf, and however well atteſted it may be to them) that water,

ter, in certain parts of the world, frequently becomes as hard and ſolid as the earth itſelf, and as capable of bearing armies upon it *. In all caſes, indeed, of an unuſual and extraordinary nature; in all caſes eſpecially wherein our greateſt happineſs may be intimately concerned, we have a right to call for an extraordinary degree of teſtimony; ſuch a degree of teſtimony, as is fully proportionate to the natural incredibility of the event to be atteſted: and if that be granted to us, to refuſe our aſſent to the exiſtence of the fact, which it is urged to ſupport, merely becauſe it is not agreeable to our own experience, is as unreaſonable and unjuſtifiable, as it is plainly repugnant to the ſentiments and practice of the world. To ſay that we will not believe even a whole hoſt of witneſſes, except we know beforehand by other arguments, that what they tell us is actually true, or highly probable at leaſt, is fundamentally to deſtroy all uſe

* See *Criterion*. By the Revd. Mr. Douglaſs.

uſe of human teſtimony; it is to put a conſtraint upon our nature, and to reject the dictates even of common ſenſe. For whoſe experience is ſo ſmall, as not to have taught him, that as there is ſometimes probability without truth; ſo there is frequently truth where there is no probability? If it implies no contradiction, that the courſe of nature may change; if miracles are in themſelves poſſible, as undoubtedly they are to that almighty Being, to whoſe agency alone we impute them; if, when performing, they are as much the object of our ſenſes, as any other events can be ſuppoſed to be—if, for inſtance, I can be as certain of the fact, ſhould I, at any time, ſee an acute fever removed, at once, upon the mere ſpeaking of a word, as I may be certain, if I perceive it yielding, by ſlow degrees, to the ſalutary preſcriptions of the phyſician—may I not relate what I have thus ſeen to other people? And what ſufficient reaſon can be given, from the nature

ture of the fact itſelf I mean, why they ſhould not believe my teſtimony in this caſe, as well as in ſuch others, as may have more conformity to their proper experience? If miracles may be the objects of ſight and evidence, as well as other, more uſual, facts, no ſufficient reaſon, I am ſure, can be aſſigned, why they ſhould not be equally the objects of credibility. It is not neceſſary, therefore, that every individual, who is contemporary with the prophet, and ſuppoſed to be intereſted in the matter of a divine revelation, ſhould have ocular evidence in proof of his divine inſpiration; becauſe they may be ſatisfactorily convinced of the truth of this eſſential point by the united teſtimony of a ſufficient number of living witneſſes, into whoſe competency for judgement, veracity and ſincerity they have abundant opportunity to make the proper enquiry.

XLVI. But if the revelation given to the prophet be intended to affect future

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ages, as well as that wherein it is firſt delivered; if it be propoſed as the object of univerſal belief, and be deſigned to influence the religious practice of all nations, to whom it ſhall be duly made known and publiſhed—how ſhall diſtant generations, how ſhall ſuch perſons, for inſtance, as are far removed from the times, wherein the prophet lived, be thoroughly ſatisfied of the fundamental points abovementioned; namely, that he was no impoſtor, that he actually worked miracles in proof of the divine authority ſpeaking in him, and, conſequently, that the doctrines and precepts, thus recommended to the general acceptance, were really diſcovered to him by the immediate inſpiration of heaven? They are, certainly, to proceed with the utmoſt diligence, caution and ſincerity in making the important enquiry; they are to diveſt themſelves, as much as poſſible, of all prejudices and preconceived opinions, before they enter upon the neceſſary examination;

nation; they are to believe nothing, unleſs it be founded upon ſufficient argument, nor are they to deny their aſſent to any thing, which is ſupported by all the proof, which the nature of the thing in queſtion will admit of. For God is not a hard maſter; nor will he require us to embrace any ſyſtem of notions as comeing from him, unleſs there be abundant teſtimony to convince our underſtanding, that they really do ſo.

XLVII. Now that paſt facts, in general, may be handed down to the lateſt poſterity with ſuch circumſtances, and in ſuch a manner as to become the objects of a rational credibility, cannot be ſeriouſly doubted by any thinking perſon, who is acquainted with the diſpoſitions of the human nature, and with the commanding power of evidence upon our minds. Are we not, for example, as certain, that there formerly exiſted ſuch perſons as Alexander the Great and Julius Cæſar, and that the one conquered the kingdom

kingdom of Perſia, and the other triumphed over the liberties of his country, as we are aſſured, that queen Elizabeth, ſome time ſince, reigned in this iſland, or, indeed, that George the ſecond is at preſent ſovereign of Great Britain? Whatever nice differences between the various degrees of certitude the ſubtle diſputant may imagine that he can diſcover by the help of his metaphyſical ſcales, with regard to all the moral and civil purpoſes of life, we can, in reality, no more doubt of the former of theſe facts, than we do of the latter. Nor will it be ſufficient to prove the hiſtory of paſt events uncertain, and not to be depended upon in caſes of any importance, to aſſert, that they come to us through the channel of human teſtimony and tradition, that is, through the evidence of men, who are by nature both fallible and peccable. For human tradition and teſtimony may be attended with ſuch circumſtances as to yield full

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aſſurance to any reaſonable perſon, not only of the exiſtence of ſuch paſt events, as may be conformable to his own experience, but even of thoſe miraculous facts, which are contrary to the uſual courſe and operations of nature. And therefore he who ſhall doubt of the exiſtence of theſe *extraordinary facts*, and reject them, (for of the credibility of ſuch only are we at preſent enquiring into) without being able to aſſign any other reaſon for his doubting and rejecting them, than becauſe they are delivered down to him by human teſtimony and tradition, would deſervedly render himſelf ridiculous in the opinion of every candid and competent judge. Let us then enquire, with all the attention which ſo intereſting a ſubject calls for, what is the ſolid ground of the minds aſſent in theſe caſes; and what are the leading circumſtances, which will vindicate a reaſonable man for giving credit to facts, even of a miraculous kind, ſaid to be done many ages paſt; for arguing

from them, as from undoubted truths; and, as it may happen, for regulating his moral and religious conduct by concluſions drawn from them. A wiſe man never quits ſight of reaſon, nor ever follows its auſpicious influence to more effectual purpoſe, than when he exactly proportions his aſſent and practice to the ſeveral degrees of evidence, as they appear to his well-informed judgement.

XLVIII. If then the miraculous facts, which are propoſed for our belief, and upon the credit of which the divine authority of a particular ſyſtem of doctrines and precepts depends, are ſuch, 1. as do not imply a ſelf-contradiction in them: 2. If they appear to have been done publickly, in the view of a great multitude of people, and with a profeſſed intention to eſtabliſh the divine authority of the perſon or perſons who did them: 3. If they were many in number, frequently repeated and continued for a ſeries of years together: 4. If they

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were of an intereſting nature in themſelves, likely to have made ſtrong impreſſions upon the minds of all who ſaw and heard of them, and, for that reaſon probably, much attended to, talked of and examined into at the time of their performance: 5. If the effects produced by them were not tranſient, but laſting; ſuch as muſt have exiſted for many years, and were capable, all the while, of being diſproved if they were not real: 6. If they were committed to writing at, or very near, the time, when they are ſaid to have been done, and by perſons of undoubted integrity, who tell us that they had been eye-witneſſes of the events which they relate; by perſons, who having ſufficient opportunity of knowing the whole truth of what they bear teſtimony to, could not poſſibly be deceived themſelves; and who, having no conceivable motive nor temptation to falſify their evidence, cannot, with the leaſt ſhadow of probability, be ſuſpected of intending

to deceive other people: 7. If there be no proof, nor well-grounded ſuſpicion of proof, that the teſtimony of thoſe, who bear witneſs to theſe extraordinary facts, was ever contradicted even by ſuch as profeſſed themſelves open enemies to their perſons, characters and views, though the facts were firſt publiſhed upon the ſpot, where they are ſaid to have been originally performed, and amongſt perſons, who were engaged in private intereſt, and furniſhed with full authority, inclination and opportunity to have manifeſted the falſity of them, and to have detected the impoſture, had they been able: 8. If, on the contrary, the exiſtence of theſe facts be expreſsly allowed by the perſons, who thought themſelves moſt concerned to prevent the genuine conſequences, which might be deduced from them; and there were, originally, no other diſputes about them, but to what ſufficient cauſe they were to be imputed. 9. If, again, the wit-

neſſes, from whom we have theſe facts, were many in number, all of them unanimous in the ſubſtance of their evidence, and all, as may be collected from their whole conduct, men of ſuch unqueſtionable good ſenſe, as to ſecure them againſt all deluſion in themſelves, and of ſuch undoubted integrity and unimpeached veracity, as to place them beyond all ſuſpicion of any deſign to put an impoſture upon others—if they were men, who ſhewed the ſincerity of their own conviction by acting under the uniform influence of the extraordinary works, which they bore witneſs to, in expreſs contradiction to all their former prejudices and moſt favoured notions; in expreſs contradiction to every flattering proſpect of worldly honour, profit and advantage either for themſelves or for their friends; and when they could not but be previouſly aſſured, that ignominy, perſecution, miſery and even death itſelf, moſt probably, would attend the conſtant and invariable perſeverance in their teſti-

mony: 10. If theſe witneſſes, in order that their evidence might have the greater weight with a doubting world, (each nation being already in poſſeſſion of its own eſtabliſhed religion) were themſelves enabled to perform ſuch extraordinary works, as teſtifyed the clear and indiſputable interpoſition of a divine power in favour of their veracity; and, after having undergone the ſevereſt afflictions, vexations and torments, at length laid down their lives, in confirmation of the truth of the facts aſſerted by them: 11. If great multitudes of the contemporaries of theſe witneſſes, men of almoſt all nations, tempers and profeſſions, were perſuaded by them, that theſe facts were really performed in the manner related, and gave the ſtrongeſt teſtimony, which it was in their power to give, of the firmneſs of their belief of them, by immediately breaking through all their ancient attachments, and connections of friendſhip, intereſt, country, and even of religion,

religion, and by acting in expreſs contradiction to them: 12. If the revolutions introduced in the moral and religious world, ſince the period wherein theſe facts are ſaid to have happened, have been juſt ſuch as they would, probably, have been, upon a ſuppoſition of the truth of them, and cannot poſſibly be accounted for from any other adequate cauſe: 13. And, laſtly, if we have all the proof, which the exacteſt rules of the ſevereſt criticiſm can require, to evince, that no alterations have been made in the original records and writings left us by theſe witneſſes in any material article of their evidence, ſince their firſt publication, either through accident or deſign; but that they have been tranſmitted to us in all their genuine purity, as they were left by their authors.——In ſuch a ſituation of things, where ſo great a variety of circumſtances, where, indeed, all imaginable ctrcumſtances mutually concur to confirm, ſtrengthen and ſup-

port each others evidence, and concenter, as it were, in atteſtation of the ſame intereſting ſeries of events, without a ſingle argument on the other ſide, but the mere extraordinaryneſs of the facts—ſhall we not be juſtly accuſed of indulging an unreaſonable incredulity in denying our aſſent to them? And will not ſuch incredulity be as dangerous, as it is ridiculous? If facts atteſted in ſo clear, deciſive and unexceptionable a manner, and delivered down to poſterity with ſo many conſpiring ſigns and monuments of truth, are, nevertheleſs, not to be believed; it is, I think, impoſſible for the united wiſdom of mankind to point out any evidence of hiſtorical events, which will juſtify a wiſe and cautious man for giving credit to them—and, conſequently, with regard to paſt ages, all will be as clouds and thick darkneſs to us; all will be heſitation and ſcepticiſm; nor will any thing be credible, which comes not confirmed to us by the report of our own ſenſes and experience.

perience. In ſhort, where there is the ſtrongeſt aſſurance of the exiſtence of any particular ſeries of paſt facts, which we are capable of acquiring, according to the preſent frame of our nature and the ſtate of things in the world, to reject theſe facts after all, and to pretend to excuſe ourſelves from not believing them, upon the bare ſuſpicion of a poſſibility that they may be falſe, is a moſt abſurd contradiction to the principles of common ſenſe, and to the univerſal practice of mankind.

XLIX. We cannot, indeed, in the nature of the thing itſelf, be made quite ſo certain, that God almighty has diſcovered his will, in an extraordinary manner, to any other perſon, as we ſhould be, had ſuch a revelation been immediately impreſſed upon our own minds: nor can we, at preſent, have the ſame high degree of demonſtration of the exiſtence of miracles formerly done, as if we

we had either ſeen them performed with our own eyes, or had been contemporaries of the perſons, who were witneſſes to the working of them. But then the queſtion is not concerning the various degrees of certainty, which the human mind is capable of diſcerning, and which in moral matters frequently requires much nicety to be accurately meaſured, and preciſely determined; but whether paſt facts, even thoſe which are of a miraculous kind, may not, in general, be conveyed to us with ſuch a degree of conviction, as ſhall render the belief of them reaſonable: whether they may not be attended with ſuch a ſtrong degree of evidence and aſſurance, as may be ſufficient, if occaſion requires, to inform and direct our religious conduct, and to remove all our real ſcruples and doubtfulneſs concerning them. Should it, however, be ſtill urged, that the extraordinary facts, ſaid to have been formerly done in atteſta-

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tion of a particular revelation of the divine will, ſhould be performed over again for the ſatisfaction of every individual in every age and nation, whom ſuch revelation may concern, a very little attention will be ſufficient to convince us, that ſuch a demand is as abſurd in itſelf, as it has been ſhewed to be entirely unneceſſary. For, miracles being changes made in the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, nothing can be clearer, than that it muſt be of the eſſence of this kind of evidence not to be frequent. For as we know nothing of the laws or courſe of nature, but from long obſervation and experience, from ſeeing the conſtant, regular and uniform determinations of bodies, the powers of certain cauſes to produce certain effects, and the inability of thoſe cauſes to produce certain other effects—if interruptions of theſe laws were common, we ſhould never be able to tell, which were laws of nature and which not; and, conſequently, could never venture to pronounce with

with certainty, that theſe interruptions were real miracles. *

L. Having laid down theſe general principles, which, it is humbly preſumed, will appear clear, reaſonable and uncontrovertible to every ſerious and impartial enquirer after truth, we will now bring the intereſting ſubject home to ourſelves; we will go on to examine, with the ſame candour and diligence which have hitherto guided our reſearches—whether the almighty Being, who governs all things by his wiſe and good Providence, has, in fact, ever diſcovered his will to mankind in an extraordinary manner; and, in particular, we will take a full and candid review of the proofs, which may be urged in atteſtation of the divine original of the Chriſtian religion, as this religion appears to ſtand faireſt in the univerſal opinion, to be the genuine offſpring of an immediate revelation from

* See *an Enquiry into the evidences of religion, by Mrs. Newcome.*

heaven.

heaven. For though divines and law-givers, convinced of the great advantages which would reſult to their ſeveral ſocieties if their doctrines and inſtitutions were believed to be of celeſtial birth, have, in almoſt all ages and countries of the world, laid in their claim to the high privilege of having been inſpired by their favourite deities: yet have their pretenſions been generally exploded, as ſo many pious fictions without baſis or ſupport, as ſoon as they have been tried by the infallible touchſtone of evidence. Let it, however, be obſerved, that I do not here omit the examination of the arguments, which are uſually produced in favour of the divine authority of the Moſaic diſpenſation, becauſe I am not entirely perſuaded of their ſufficiency; but becauſe a thorough and effectual demonſtration of the celeſtial origin of the goſpel will, at the ſame time, prove, vindicate and eſtabliſh the authenticity of the Jewiſh ſcriptures, theſe ſcriptures being continually

continually acknowledged, and every where appealed to in the records of Chriſtianity as genuine, true, and derived immediately from heaven through the miniſtration of Moſes and the prophets.

LI. Thus then muſt the intereſting queſtion concerning the divine original of the Chriſtian religion appear to every attentive and competent reader, who takes the New Teſtament into his hands, with an inflexible reſolution to think ſeriouſly for himſelf, and to reaſon impartially upon what he finds written in thoſe volumes. Behold Chriſt Jeſus claiming to be divinely inſpired; claiming to be ſent from heaven in an extraordinary manner, and to have received a commiſſion immediately from the almighty God himſelf to ſpeak to the world in his name; and in his name and by his authority to inſtruct mankind in every thing, which they were to believe and to do in order to obtain everlaſting life. And, accordingly, we ſee him going up and down

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in the ſeveral parts of the land of Judea, and addreſſing his affecting diſcourſes to the aſtoniſhed multitude with all the power and authority of a prophet, who was conſcious of his high commiſſion. We ſee him every where correcting the erroneous opinions and practices, which had corrupted the morality of his countrymen; and inculcating a more pure, explicit, uniform and entire ſcheme of religion, than had, hitherto, been ever collected together, or, perhaps, been known to mankind. We ſee him, moreover, laying open and explaining to his admiring hearers, in the words of him who ſent him, the ſalutary ſcheme or method, which had been ordained by the divine wiſdom to redeem and reſtore a ſinful world to the favour of their Creator, Governour and Judge; preſſing upon them the happy effects of a ſincere repentance, in conſequence of this ſcheme of redemption, and aſſuring them of the ſufficient aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit, which

which ſhould never be wanting to the earneſt prayers and endeavours of the faithful. And, in the laſt place, we behold him exhorting, encouraging and authoriſing his apoſtles and followers to go unto all nations, and to make proſelytes in his name; to publiſh to them the words which they had heard him ſpeak, and to declare the mighty deeds which they had ſeen him perform; to proclaim the ſure reward of everlaſting life in a future ſtate to all ſuch, as ſhould ſincerely believe the divinity of his doctrines, and punctually obey his commands; and to denounce eternal miſery to the ſtubbornly-unbelieving and diſobedient.

LII. Such was the commiſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, as his diſciples received it from his own mouth, and have tranſmitted it to the world in the books before us. The firſt thing, therefore, to be enquired into is, whether Chriſt himſelf was fully perſuaded of his extraordinary miſſion; whether he was ſincere in his own belief

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of being divinely inſpired, or, whether he was a crafty impoſtor, and acted with a concealed intention to deceive mankind by a well-contrived and well-conducted cheat? Never, ſurely, was there a character upon earth more remote from all ſuſpicion of fraud, artifice and impoſture, than that of Jeſus Chriſt. If we take the account of his life, as the principal circumſtances of it are recorded in the writings of thoſe, who were beſt acquainted with him; we ſhall find, in his whole behaviour, the moſt unblemiſhed purity and ſanctity of manners, an ardent zeal for the ſervice and glory of God, and a diſintereſted benevolence towards all mankind. He was, moreover, humble, meek and condeſcending; gentle to all men and patient of contradiction: nor was there any thing which he more ſtrictly forbad, or more ſeverely rebuked in his followers, than a ſpirit of ſelf-ſufficiency, pride, domination, and con-

tention for honours and preheminence *. The plan of an impoſtor is a plan of ſelfiſhneſs; a plan of vanity, or of authority, or of ſenſuality, or of wealth, or of ambition: but examine the conduct of Chriſt with the ſevereſt eye, and you will ſee nothing of the maxims and ſubtleties of worldly wiſdom and policy relatively either to himſelf or his followers. As he uſed no inſinuating arts to ingratiate himſelf with the rich, the great or the learned; ſo neither did he ſtudy to ſecure the aſſiſtance or protection of any of thoſe religious factions into which his country was divided, or to captivate the favour of the people: but with an equal and impartial ſeverity he rebuked the reigning vices, and contradicted the moſt favoured prejudices of the whole age and nation wherein he lived. Self-denial, and the mortification of the appetites

* *See Dr. Leland againſt the Moral Philoſopher*, and his other moſt uſeful writings.

tites and paſſions were conſtantly inſiſted upon as eſſential conditions of becoming, and continuing his diſciples. In his exhortations to his proſelytes he prepared them to expect daily reproaches, poverty and perſecution in this world; whilſt the rewards, which he promiſed to them for their fidelity and ſteady adherence to his words and doctrines, were removed to a great diſtance, were entirely of a ſpiritual nature, and by no means fitted to work upon the affections of the generality of mankind; they were ſuch as aroſe from the teſtimony of a good conſcience, a ſenſe of the divine love and favour here, and the perfection of holyneſs and happyneſs in the viſion and enjoyment of the Deity in a future ſtate——Theſe are not the artifices of an impoſtor!

LIII. But though the integrity of the Chriſtian lawgiver, and the undeſigning innocence of his life, will thoroughly acquit him with every candid perſon of the imputation of being concerned either in

tention for honours and preheminence *. The plan of an impoſtor is a plan of ſelfiſhneſs; a plan of vanity, or of authority, or of ſenſuality, or of wealth, or of ambition: but examine the conduct of Chriſt with the ſevereſt eye, and you will ſee nothing of the maxims and ſubtleties of worldly wiſdom and policy relatively either to himſelf or his followers. As he uſed no inſinuating arts to ingratiate himſelf with the rich, the great or the learned; ſo neither did he ſtudy to ſecure the aſſiſtance or protection of any of thoſe religious factions into which his country was divided, or to captivate the favour of the people: but with an equal and impartial ſeverity he rebuked the reigning vices, and contradicted the moſt favoured prejudices of the whole age and nation wherein he lived. Self-denial, and the mortification of the appetites

* *See Dr. Leland againſt the Moral Philoſopher*, and his other moſt uſeful writings.

tites and paſſions were conſtantly inſiſted upon as eſſential conditions of becoming, and continuing his diſciples. In his exhortations to his proſelytes he prepared them to expect daily reproaches, poverty and perſecution in this world; whilſt the rewards, which he promiſed to them for their fidelity and ſteady adherence to his words and doctrines, were removed to a great diſtance, were entirely of a ſpiritual nature, and by no means fitted to work upon the affections of the generality of mankind; they were ſuch as aroſe from the teſtimony of a good conſcience, a ſenſe of the divine love and favour here, and the perfection of holyneſs and happyneſs in the viſion and enjoyment of the Deity in a future ſtate——Theſe are not the artifices of an impoſtor!

LIII. But though the integrity of the Chriſtian lawgiver, and the undeſigning innocence of his life, will thoroughly acquit him with every candid perſon of the imputation of being concerned either in

contriving, or in carrying on a ſcheme of wilful fraud : yet, certainly, it will be laying too great a weight upon this argument, to conclude from thence alone, that his pretenſions were well-founded; that he was really inſpired from above, and that his words were the aweful ſuggeſtions of almighty God. For many good men, we know, men of the beſt and moſt upright intentions, have ſometimes ſuffered their judgements to be hurried away by the ſtrength of their imaginations, and have weakly miſtaken the workings of their own fancies for the illuminations of heaven. Notwithſtanding, therefore, the moſt ſpecious appearances of ſanctity, and the loudeſt claim of inſpiration, we have ſtill a right to ſuſpend our belief, and even to deny our aſſent to the important article of Chriſts divine miſſion, until we are entirely ſatisfied, that as he was not a cunning impoſtor, ſo neither was he a weak enthuſiaſt. Once more, then, let us have recourſe

recourſe to the books of the New Teſtament, which are ſtill lying open before us; let us examine well his doctrines, and meditate with attention upon his diſcourſes, and then honeſtly aſk ourſelves —can any thing be more weighed, more unaffected, more ſimple, more reaſonable and more conſiſtent in themſelves, and with one another, than they are? Can any thing be more free from all thoſe unintelligible, flighty, rapturous and ecſtatic expreſſions, which uſually diſtinguiſh the dreams of the entranced viſionary, from the genuine dictates of heaven-born reaſon? In the mind of Chriſt no inequality appears, nothing of melancholy which impoſes upon ſome, or of pride, preſumption and arrogance, which abuſe ſo many others; but, on the contrary, a regular train of conſiſtent thinking runs through all his words, and a ſober prudence reigns in his whole behaviour. Could a mere enthuſiaſt have perſuaded the multitude of the

Jews to believe, that he made the blind to ſee; the deaf to hear; the dumb to ſpeak, and the lame to walk? Could an enthuſiaſt have raiſed the dead to life? Could an enthuſiaſt have known what was in the hearts of other people, or have foretold his own death and reſurrection with all the attending circumſtances? Could an enthuſiaſt have pronounced the approaching deſtruction of Jeruſalem, the diſperſion of the Jewiſh nation and the future ſucceſs of his own doctrines? Read the hiſtory of Jeſus Chriſt, and you will find the heavens, the earth, the ſea, and all the powers of nature ſtanding ready to obey his commands: like the almighty Creator, in the beginning, he ſpake the word only, and it was done.

LIV. They are the works of Chriſt, therefore, ſo various in their kind and ſo frequently repeated; ſo extenſive and beneficial in their influence, and ſo laſting and examinable in their effects—they are the miracles of Chriſt, performed in the

the moſt open and publick places of reſort, in the midſt of populous cities, and before declared enemies, engaged by every motive of inclination, paſſion and intereſt to detect the fraud, had there been any room to have done it—they are the many ſenſible changes made by Chriſt in the ordinary and fixed laws of nature, which afford the moſt infallible aſſurance, which can be either demanded or given, that he was neither an impoſtor nor an enthuſiaſt; that he was not deceived himſelf in the high claim, which he made, to divine inſpiration, nor acted with an intention to deceive other people; that, agreeably to his profeſſions, he was ſent from God with authority to teach mankind a new and more perfect rule of religious faith and action; and that God was with him, in an extraordinary manner, in all things which he ſaid and did in his name. For that Chriſts mighty works, as they are repreſented in the goſpels, may be accounted for agreeably to

the common courſe of Providence, and the known laws of nature; that they may, any ways, be accounted for, without the immediate interpoſition of an all-wiſe and almighty Being, is hardly poſſible to be conceived by any underſtanding perſon. It is not poſſible to be conceived, for inſtance, that they were oweing to magick, or to a ſuperior ſkill in the occult qualities of bodies, their imperceptible attractions and repulſions, their mutual relations to and various operations upon each other. For what is this magick, or power of conjuration, as it has been ſometimes called? The world is now become too wiſe to ſuffer itſelf to be amuſed with idle and unmeaning terms to no purpoſe, but to deceive ourſelves with a ſhew of ſcience falſely ſo called. We know that every effect muſt have a cauſe; and that this cauſe (no matter how it operates) muſt be adequate, muſt be ſufficient to produce the effect, or elſe that it is no cauſe at all—Are then the laws of nature,

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the laws originally impoſed upon this wondrous ſyſtem by its almighty Creator, at the command, and under the controul of a weak, wretched, ſinful and preſumptuous mortal? Can the moſt profound and penetrating knowledge of the latent properties, and ſecret influences of herbs, or trees, or minerals; can the imaginary powers of a mere *name*, how ſacred ſoever it may be, or the charms of I know not what fatal combination of letters, enable mere fleſh and blood to ſay, with effect, to a man ſtruck with the palſy, take up thy bed and walk? Or to one who is born blind, open thine eyes and ſee? Or to another, who has lain four days dead in the grave, Lazarus come forth?

LV. Scarcely leſs weak, and inſufficient is it to aſſert, that Chriſt performed his mighty works by colluſion, by juggle, and a crafty impoſition upon the ſenſes of the bye-ſtanders. What juggling can ſtop the fury of the ſea, when the waves thereof rage horribly; or calm the

the roaring of tempeſtuous winds? What place for colluſion, or ſelf-deception, could there poſſibly be in works done in the open day, and in the ſight of the ſun? in actions frequently repeated? in actions ſo momentous in themſelves, ſo very different from each other, and ſo permanent in their conſequences? in actions performed in the midſt of many jealous, envious and powerful adverſaries, who were continually lying in wait to entrap, and to expoſe him to the ſcorn and deriſion of his admiring followers? Could mere confidence in the ſkill and virtues of Chriſt, or a ſtrong perſuaſion of his miraculous power in healing all ſorts of diſtempers, if he really had not ſuch a power, reſtore ſight to perſons, who had been born blind, or remove the moſt inveterate diſeaſes in an inſtant, as it were? Certainly not; for whatever changes the activity of a lively fancy, and the force of a vigorous imagination may ſometimes produce in the human conſtitution, by giveing a new ſpring to the blood and humours; yet

yet that they ſhould confer hearing upon the deaf, or ſpeech upon the dumb; or that they ſhould operate in Lazarus, who had been four days dead, is impoſſible to be conceived. Nor ſhall we approach nearer to the true origin of theſe mighty works, though, with the malicious Jews, we ſhould inſinuate, that Chriſt might be aſſiſted in the performance of them by the immediate aid of evil ſpirits. How far, indeed, the power of theſe beings may extend, with reſpect to their influence upon the affairs of this earthly globe, is very difficult preciſely to determine in our preſent dawn of knowledge. Thus much, however, we may with confidence conclude, that their agency is limited; that they are under a ſuperiour controul; that they have bounds ſet them, which they cannot paſs, and that there are certain works beyond the extent of their faculties to perform. Is, for inſtance, any being, that is not ſelf-exiſtent, all-wiſe and all-mighty, endued with a power

power of creation, and of giving breath and thought to the inanimate and inert particles of duſt? But Chriſt did even this; he not only called other perſons from death into life, but he raiſed himſelf, alſo, from the depth of the grave. So again; the ſalutary tendency of his doctrines; the avowed end of his coming into the world (to redeem mankind from the bondage of ſin, and to form to himſelf a holy people peculiarly zealous of good works) and the benevolent principle, which invariably accompanied his works, all conſpire to demonſtrate, that he held no correſpondence with, that he received no aſſiſtance whatever from the malignant prince of infernal ſpirits. But if the mighty works of Chriſt cannot be accounted for agreeably to the laws of nature, and the ordinary courſe of Gods providence; if they were not cauſed by the force of magick and conjuration, nor worked by the help of juggle and colluſion between Chriſt and his followers;

if

if they were not the caſual productions of a ſtrong fancy and warm imagination, nor brought about by the aid and cooperation of evil ſpirits—there remains, I think, but one other poſſible way, by which they could be effected, and that is, by the finger of God, by the will and immediate interpoſition of the almighty Author of nature. No other cauſe, but this, is adequate to ſuch extraordinary effects; this is fully ſo. As therefore it is irrational to acquieſce in any other, ſo muſt it be thought equally irrational not to acquieſce in this. And ſhall we ſay now, that faith, grounded upon ſuch an extraordinary and over-powering weight of evidence, is not founded upon argument? Let the moſt wary and diſtruſtful reaſoner put himſelf, for a ſhort moment, into the place of the apoſtles; let him ſeriouſly and earneſtly attend to the wonderful things, which they ſaw and heard; and then let him deal ſincerely with himſelf, and conſcientiouſly determine,

termine, whether it would have been poſſible for him to have reſiſted the force and authority of the heavenly teſtimony? Whether he alſo muſt not have believed, that Chriſt was the ſon of God, and that God was with him in all that he ſaid and did; and, in conſequence of ſuch belief, whether he alſo muſt not have become one of his devoted followers and diſciples?

LVI. What the apoſtles and evangeliſts had themſelves ſeen and heard, full of the ſame divine ſpirit, which had influenced and animated the founder of their faith, we behold them with amazing zeal, diligence and earneſtneſs publiſhing to all the world, propagating with a rapidity of ſucceſs hardly to be conceived, and committing to writing for the everlaſting benefit of all future generations. But who are theſe apoſtles, who preſs the miraculous actions of their maſter upon us with ſo much vehemence and authority? What is their true character? Are

they

they perſons, whoſe teſtimony we may with confidence rely upon? Are they men of unqueſtionable ſenſe, integrity and religion? Men of a cool, ſedate, diſcerning and a rational turn of mind? Are they men, who had ſufficient opportunity to inform themſelves of the certainty of all the wonderful things, which they relate unto us of the life and actions, of the death and reſurrection of Chriſt? What proof have we, that there was no combination, no conſpiracy entered into and carried on amongſt them, to impoſe upon the credulity of their fellow-creatures, by bearing witneſs to a ſeries of impoſture and cunningly-deviſed fables? What evidence have they ever offered to the world, that they were divinely commiſſioned to demand our belief of the doctrines delivered by them in their maſters name, and to require us to regulate our religious practice by his precepts? Having never ſeen the miracles of Chriſt ourſelves, nor heard him preaching, nor been

been bleſſed with a particular revelation from heaven in our own perſons, we have an unqueſtionable right to be entirely ſatisfied in every one of theſe articles, before we reſign our faith to the teſtimony of the apoſtles, and give them full credit in matters ſo remote from our own times, ſo unknown to the ordinary experience of mankind, and ſo little ſimilar to the uſual manner, in which the divine Providence chooſes to conduct itſelf towards the children of men.

LVII. Once more, then, let us have recourſe to the ſacred code of chriſtianity, and collect from thence the genuine hiſtory and character of the apoſtles. They were perſons, who had been ſelected by Chriſt, upon his firſt entrance upon his holy office, to be his witneſſes to the reſt of the world of the doctrines, which they ſhould hear him deliver, and of the mighty works, which they ſhould ſee him perform in confirmation of the divinity of thoſe doctrines. They attended

upon

upon him with the moſt perſevering diligence, ardour and fidelity during the whole courſe of his miniſtry; they do not appear to have been ever abſent from him; they heard all his words; to them were his religious diſcourſes principally directed, and in their preſence did he make the blind to ſee, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the dead to live. What, therefore, the apoſtles had heard with their ears, what they had beheld with their eyes, what their hands had handled of the word of life, what they had the concurrent teſtimony of all their ſenſes to aſſure them of, that they teſtified to the world. And as there is the ſtrongeſt proof, that the apoſtles could not be deceived themſelves in the unanimous teſtimony, which they bear to the miracles of Chriſt; ſo have we all the evidence, which can reaſonably be demanded to convince us, that they had no intention to impoſe upon others, or to put a ſolemn and deliberate cheat upon mankind. For we may diſcern in them all thoſe marks

of undeſigning probity and ſimplicity; of zeal for the honour of God, the cauſe of truth and the good of their fellow-creatures, which render it almoſt impoſſible for us to ſuſpect the veracity of perſons, in whom ſuch excellent qualifications are found. Their principal attention, their chief ſollicitude was to recover mankind from idolatry and wickedneſs to the knowledge, love and adoration of the true God; to engage them to a life of purity, righteouſneſs and charity; and to raiſe their hopes and deſires above this vain and periſhing earth to things inviſible and eternal, though at the extreme peril of all that was near and dear to themſelves.

LVIII. The apoſtles of Chriſt, inſtead of ſeeking their own profit or glory, inſtead of indulging their vanity in propagating their own notions, opinions and inventions, inſtead of erecting themſelves into heads and founders of a growing ſect, never ſo much as ſpeak in their own names, but give the whole merit of all

that they ſay or do to their crucified Maſter: their higheſt ambition was to be reputed his diſciples, nor did they ever aſſume a greater honour to themſelves than that of being his faithful followers; than that of being ambaſſadours, ſent by him to preach his words, to teſtify what they had ſeen and heard, and to publiſh his religion to the world. But what ſufficient motive, what conceivable temptation can be aſſigned, why they ſhould act in this humble, lowly, ſelf-denying and diſintereſted manner, (for they were neither fools nor madmen) if they themſelves had not been entirely perſuaded of the truth of what they related, and had not looked upon themſelves as divinely authoriſed, and under a ſort of neceſſity, to act as they did; eſpecially as they had been forewarned by the very Maſter, whoſe doctrines they delivered, and whoſe miracles they aſſerted, that their eſteem, love and zeal for him would expoſe them, as in fact it did, to hatred, reproach and

perſecutions both from the Jews and Gentiles, and even to death itſelf. But what puts the veracity of the apoſtles quite out of doubt, and ſtamps the ſeal of heaven itſelf upon their teſtimony, are the miracles which they themſelves were enabled to perform in the name of Chriſt, and by virtue of an authority derived from him. Had they, indeed, referred their admiring followers to miracles, which nobody knew any thing of but themſelves; to works done in an obſcure corner of an obſcure country, and before a few of their own aſſociates, before ſuch only, as had been already perſuaded of the truth of Chriſts divine miſſion, there might have been ſome grounds for ſuſpicion of fraud; there might have been ſome room to imagine, that the repreſentation, which they give of themſelves, was not altogether fair and impartial. But when they dared to appeal, in writing, to a ſeries of extraordinary facts done by them in the moſt

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polite and populous cities of the Roman empire, and in the view of thouſands even of their moſt prejudiced enemies; to a ſeries of facts which were ſtill capable of being examined into at the time of their appeal, we can want no ſtronger argument to convince us either of their truth and integrity, on the one hand, or of the ſoundneſs, coolneſs and ſobriety of their judgement, on the other. For though a warm and over-heated imagination may ſo far impoſe upon itſelf, as to apprehend that it ſees viſions and hears revelations, when it does not; yet no perſons in their ſenſes, no perſons, who are capable of delivering to the world a rational and conſiſtent ſcheme of moral and religious duty ſuch as we read in the New Teſtament, can be ſo far deceived by the power of fancy and a ſpirit of enthuſiaſm, as publickly to maintain, that they have made the blind to ſee, the lame to walk, and the dead to live, if there were no facts to

vindicate the truth of ſuch aſſertions—or if the human mind be, indeed, capable of receiving ſuch ſtrong deluſions, yet it is beyond all force of conception to imagine, that other perſons could have been ſeriouſly impoſed upon by the pretenſions of madmen, without bearing their teſtimony againſt them, and taking ſpeedy and effectual means to ſtop the progreſs of the faſehood.

LIX. Nor ought it to leſſen the authority of the apoſtles, or to detract from the high regard, which is uſually payed to their evidence, ſhould we hear it ſuggeſted, that they were willing witneſſes in the cauſe of Chriſt, which they had undertaken to ſupport; that they greatly intereſted themſelves in the ſucceſs of the commiſſion, with which they were charged; that they looked upon their ſupreme happineſs as concerned in their zealous endeavours to propagate the miracles of the goſpel, its doctrines and precepts, and that having haſtily admitted

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an erroneous opinion, and ſtaked their credit upon it, they were afterwards reſolved to maintain it, into whatever difficulties and hazards it might tend to plunge them. But how came the cauſe of Chriſt to be the cauſe of the apoſtles? And why did they ſo greatly intereſt themſelves in bearing teſtimony to his works, and in proving his divinity? Having been born to, and educated in, all the religious prepoſſeſſions of the reſt of their Jewiſh brethren, they could not have been ſwayed in their new faith either by previous inclination from within, or temptation from without; they could not have been byaſſed by any preconceived favour, or diſlike; they were not drawn by affection, nor daunted by fear, nor bribed by profit; they were not charmed by flattery, nor tired by ſollicitation, nor ſeduced by precedent or cuſtom, nor perverted by any indirect means whatever. Nothing, therefore, but the moſt thorough conviction of the

divine authority of Jeſus could have perſuaded them to have departed from the religion of their anceſtors which they believed to be of divine origin, and to have become the obedient diſciples of a new maſter. Nor can ſo hearty, ſincere, conſiſtent and perſevering a conviction be aſcribed to any other ſufficient cauſe, than to that demonſtration which Chriſt was every day offering to their ſenſes by his miracles, that the almighty God was with him in all things. A ſingle man, perhaps, to ſupport the credit of a ſect, which he himſelf has founded, and to ſecure its future ſucceſs in the world, may be induced to defer a great deal to the falſe point of honour, and rather to incur the peril of his life, than to recede from an erroneous opinion, which he has once adopted. But that *twelve perſons* who were not the founders of the religion they taught, and who, conſequently, had not the point of honour to ſuſtain; that *twelve perſons*, who had

had had no education, who had been brought up to ſome of the meaneſt profeſſions, who had never been accuſtomed to contemplation, and were not remarkable for their perſonal courage, ſhould enter into a conſpiracy, as it were, againſt their own preſent eaſe, intereſt and reputation; and, in manifeſt contradiction to all their native prejudices, habits and connections, ſhould boldly and ſucceſsfully undertake to go through the known world preaching a ſpiritual ſalvation in the name, and by the command, of a perſon who had ſuffered an ignominious death upon the croſs: that *twelve perſons*, I ſay, (who certainly were neither fools nor madmen) ſhould agree together to lay down their lives, if occaſion required, in atteſtation of a ſeries of facts, which they knew to be falſe; and ſhould nevertheleſs profeſs their hopes of being glorioufly rewarded in a future ſtate by a God, whom they themſelves repreſent as a Being, with whom nothing can

dwell

dwell that frameth, or propagateth a lye—is as great a miracle, as any interruption of the common courſe of nature: for no hiſtory has ever mentioned ſuch a thing, nor has any man in any age ever had experience of a fact of this kind. Such an event, as has been above deſcribed, has ſomething ſo extraordinary in it, and is ſo utterly repugnant to all the uſual obſervation and experience of mankind, that there is not, perhaps, any one of all Chriſts miracles, which is not, in its own nature, equally credible. The falſehood of a teſtimony ſo circumſtanced would be as miraculous, as are the wonderful works themſelves, the veracity of which this teſtimony is intended to eſtabliſh.

LX. The apoſtles, without doubt, greatly intereſted themſelves in the publication and propagation of Chriſtianity. But of what nature and kind was the intereſt, which they took in this extraordinary affair? It was the expectation of an

eternal

eternal reward in heaven hereafter, founded upon their bearing teſtimony to the truth, whilſt they continued upon earth. For as to worldly honours, riches and pleaſures, they neither could, nor did flatter themſelves, that any of theſe, the envied bleſſings of life, would ever fall to their ſhare. On the contrary, Chriſt himſelf had plainly foretold, and, conſequently, his whole credit with them, as a prophet, depended upon thoſe very reproaches, bonds, impriſonments and deaths, which awaited their unſhaken perſeverance in the teſtimony, which they ſhould bear to the goſpel. Chriſtians, indeed, the apoſtles were, and inſeparable attendants upon their Maſter, from the moment wherein he firſt called them to be his diſciples—and ſhall a circumſtance, which adds ſo much to the credibility of all other hiſtorians, be thought to diſqualify them, from being faithful witneſſes to the reſt of the world of the things, which he ſaid and did? Shall the evidence

dence of the apoſtles be ſcoffed at as incredible, and treated as unworthy our attention and aſſent, merely becauſe they were ſincerely convinced of the truth of the facts, which they tell us, acted conſtantly and conſiſtently under their influence, and were ready and willing to lay down their lives in confirmation of them? But ſee whither this argument leads us, and what is the genuine concluſion, which is intended to be drawn from it. We are not to give any credit to what the apoſtles relate to us concerning Chriſt and his works; becauſe, by acknowledging his divine miſſion and profeſſing their ſtedfaſt belief of his miracles, their teſtimony muſt be ſuppoſed to be influenced by their fondneſs for the new opinions, which they had embraced. Much leſs, certainly, are we to believe Jews and idolaters upon this important ſubject, perſons who ſtill continued in their infidelity. For they were equally prejudiced on the other ſide, and more ignorant than the former; and

and very reaſonable is it to conclude, that what they did not believe themſelves, they would endeavour, for their own juſtification, to repreſent in ſuch a manner, as that other perſons ſhould pay as little regard to it, as they did. Therefore we are to believe nobody upon the ſubject of Chriſtianity, nor, indeed, upon any other hiſtorical ſubject whatever. Engliſhmen, for this reaſon, are not to be truſted, when they write the hiſtory of England; nor Frenchmen to be credited, when they compoſe the annals of France. But if we muſt ſuſpend our aſſent to all paſt facts, until we meet with witneſſes of ſuch an abſolute indifference, as is here imagined, we ſhall never be able to fix it at all—and ſhould this propoſition be once admitted to have any influence in the conduct of common life, it would be impoſſible for courts of juſtice ever to proceed to ſentence; all mankind muſt be treated as knaves and impoſtors, and univerſal

verſal ſcepticiſm would be the unavoidable conſequence.

LXI. But does it not derogate from the authority of the apoſtles, does it not afford ſome little room to ſuſpect the veracity of what they tell us concerning their Maſter and themſelves, that there were ſo many perſons, both Jews and Gentiles, who heard their teſtimony, and ſaw the wonderful works which they performed, and yet ſtill perſiſted in their unbelief? No candid and competent enquirer after truth will think that it does. For God, he knows, never acts towards his accountable creatures in ſuch a manner, as to force their judgement, and irreſiſtibly to influence their moral conduct; but, on the contrary, leaves them, in all ſuch inſtances, to the application of their rational powers, and to that freedom of will, which alone conſtitute the merit of religious faith and practice. It entirely depends upon our own volition, attention

and

and diligence, whether we will ſhake off our natural indolence; whether we will exert our intellectual faculties, ſubdue our vicious inclinations, and riſe ſuperiour to the prejudices of education, paſſion and converſation. It wholly depends upon our own reſolution, upon the affections of the heart rather than the acuteneſs of the underſtanding, whether we will ſeriouſly and earneſtly advert to the evidence which is offered in proof of religious truth, and candidly give it a fair, honeſt, and impartial examination. To argue, therefore, either for the credibility, or the falſehood of any point of hiſtory or doctrine, merely from the numbers who receive or reject it, is a very fallacious way of informing the judgemcnt; and he muſt be very little acquainted with the uſual courſe of the world, who has not found by his own experience, that as there are ſome men capable of ſwallowing the greateſt abſurdities; ſo there are others equally notorious for queſtioning, denying

nying and oppoſing the plaineſt truths. If, therefore, in the caſe before us, we conſider the wickedneſs of *the Jews*, at the time when Chriſt made his appearance amongſt them, as repreſented by their own hiſtorian Joſephus; their extravagant zeal for the credit of the Moſaick law; their ſuperſtitious regard for the traditions of their forefathers, and the ſlaviſh deference which they payed to the heads of their ſects—if we conſider, likewiſe, the falſe notions which they entertained of the nature of miracles and their authority, and of the power of demons and the efficacy of phyſical cauſes—if we conſider, moreover, the partial and wrong opinions, which univerſally obtained amongſt them concerning the kingdom of the Meſſiah, and which could by no means be reconciled with the mean appearance of Jeſus; the difference in many eſſential points between their religious opinions and practices, and thoſe pre-

preſcribed and inculcated by Chriſt and his apoſtles; their indolent inattention to the moſt important duties of internal religion, and their unfitneſs for making moral inquiries on account of the narrowneſs of their principles; the inconveniencies, difficulties and perſecution, which muſt neceſſarily attend the profeſſion of a new inſtitution, which was to ſuperſede that of their ancient lawgiver, and the particular intereſt, which the rulers of the nation had to prevent the propagation of a religion ſo derogatory to that advantageous domination, which they exerciſed over the conſciences of their countrymen—by him, I ſay, who has ſo much regard for truth, as to weigh all theſe concurring circumſtances well in his mind, the obſtinacy of the infidel Jews will not be thought ſo ſtrong an argument againſt the divine original of Chriſtianity, as the converſion of ſo many of them to the faith of Chriſt will be looked upon as a demonſtration of the miracles, which

muſt have been made uſe of to extirpate prejudices ſo widely extended, and ſo deeply rooted. *

LXII. Much in the ſame manner may we argue, likewiſe, with regard to *the Gentile nations*. For beſides the cauſes of unbelief, which were common to them with the Jews, ſuch as a great corruption of morals; the prepoſſeſſions of education; the purity of the precepts of the goſpel entirely oppoſite to their vicious inclinations and practices; the temporal inconveniencies which attended the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and the temporal advantages, which might be ſecured or obtained by rejecting and oppoſing it; the mean appearance, which Chriſt made in the world and his ignominious death, which they knew not how to conciliate with the divine power aſcribed unto him by his diſciples — beſides theſe, I ſay, they had many other cauſes of unbelief

* See *Dr. Jortins diſcourſes upon the truth of the Chriſtian Religion.*

more peculiar to themſelves. They entertained a high notion of the efficacy of magick, of the ſtrength of charms and incantation, and of the almoſt-uncontroulable power of their demons and demigods; they were extremely careleſs and indifferent about all religion in general, as ſuch, having very imperfect notions of the divine Being, and of the ſpiritual adoration, which was due to him alone; and were moreover offended at the unſociableneſs of Chriſtianity, and its utter incompatibility with the eſtabliſhed worſhip of their ſeveral countries. Their great and powerful men, likewiſe, for want of attending to the intrinſick merits of the new doctrine, and of underſtanding it throughly, were not able to reconcile it with their particular views and intereſts; much leſs was it to be expected, that the prieſts, ſacrificers and artiſans, who lived by the profits of idolatry, would readily open their eyes and ears to receive a faith ſo utterly ſubverſive of their gain. Nor

would the bad opinion, which other nations, in general, had conceived of the Jews, permit them eaſily to paſs a favourable judgement upon the Chriſtians, whom they did not, at firſt, ſufficiently diſtinguiſh from that deſpiſed people. The antiquity, likewiſe, of paganiſm, and the many diſtinguiſhed bleſſings, which, it was imagined, the propitious influence of their heroes and gods had from time to time conferred upon their ſeveral countries, together with the ſimple and artleſs manner made uſe of by the firſt Chriſtians, and their followers, to propagate a religion, which had nothing in its external appearance to recommend it, may be added to the cauſes, which contributed to leſſen the force of the miracles worked by Chriſt and his apoſtles, and prevented no ſmall numbers of the rich, the great and the learned, from giving in their names amongſt the earlieſt converts to the faith and obedience which is in Jeſus. *

* See *Dr. Jortin*, as above.

LXIII. But

LXIII. But this is not our caſe; we have happily none of thoſe obſtinate prejudices to encounter with and ſubdue, which both Jew and Gentile formerly laboured under. Taught by true philoſophy we know the genuine power of miracles, and readily acknowledge, that where they are certain, uncontrouled and uncontradicted, they are the ſtrongeſt arguments, which can be urged, they are indeed infallible arguments, in proof of a providential and omnipotent interpoſition. We are therefore firmly perſuaded, that had we lived in the days of the apoſtles; that had we heard their words, and ſeen the mighty works which they performed in vindication of the divine authority, which breathed in them, we ſhould not have entertained the leaſt doubt of the competency of their united teſtimony either in point of information, integrity, or veracity; but ſhould have ſincerely believed all things which they related concerning their Maſter, and, full of the

hopes of a bleſſed immortality in another ſtate, ſhould have adhered to the new doctrine, in ſpight of all the variety of oppoſition and perſecution, which every where threatened it—and we ſhould have done well; for to act upon ſufficient evidence, to act upon the higheſt degree of probability, is to act reaſonably and wiſely; it is to follow the ſure guidance of that celeſtial light, which came down from heaven to direct our moral conduct; it is to comply with the will of almighty God himſelf. Shall we not, therefore, pay an equal reverence, regard and credit to the undoubted writings of the evangeliſts, wherein the doctrines of Chriſt are contained in his own words, and his works faithfully recorded by eye-witneſſes of them? Whilſt we have the genuine volumes of the evangeliſts and apoſtles to have recourſe to for our information and inſtruction, all the intermediate ſpace of time between us and them, (how great ſoever it may be ſuppoſed to be), is annihilated, as it were, and

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thrown quite out of the queſtion. For theſe books tranſport us, at once, into the land of Judea, and to the age of the apoſtles. By their means, we become contemporaries with Chriſt himſelf and his diſciples; we hear them preaching, and behold their extraordinary works. Suppoſing us to be fully convinced, that the New Teſtament, ſuch as we at preſent have it, was really written by the apoſtles of Chriſt, and that it is a pure and uncorrupted repreſentation of his life and diſcourſes; that it was compoſed, whilſt great numbers of the perſons, who had felt the benefit of the miracles recorded in it, remained living monuments of the writers veracity; and that it was made publick in the midſt of the profeſſed enemies of Chriſtianity, who wanted neither inclination, nor opportunity, nor power to examine into the truth of the facts alledged, and to convict the writers of falſehood, had there been any room to have done it——the reſt is all eaſy,

clear, and obvious; and whether we read the united and concurring teſtimony of the apoſtles drawn up under their own hands in the books above-mentioned, and ſealed with the ſeal of God in the miracles, which they were enabled to perform; or had heard them pronounce it themſelves, our general concluſion cannot but be the ſame; namely, that God was with Chriſt in an extraordinary manner, and that the higheſt deference, veneration, and obedience are to be payed to his doctrines and commandments.

LXIV. Now that the books of the New Teſtament are genuine and authentick; that they were compoſed by the perſons, whoſe names they bear, and publiſhed amongſt the people of the Jews very ſoon after the great events mentioned in them had happened, and that they have been faithfully tranſmitted to us without any fundamental alteration, we have every argument to convince us, which the moſt ſcrupulous examination can reaſonably

ably call for. The moſt ancient copies of them were invariably found with the names of the ſeveral evangeliſts and apoſtles prefixed to them, as we ſee at preſent; and under the ſame names have they been uniformly quoted through all the ages of eccleſiaſtical antiquity. They were written to large bodies of men, and regularly read to them in all their ſtated aſſemblies which were very frequent, and upon their ſolemn feſtivals. They were not addreſſed to particular perſons to be kept carefully locked up by them, and by them only to be ſeen, produced and explained upon extraordinary occaſions, like the Sibylline oracles; but, whilſt the originals were preſerved in the archives of the church, faithful tranſcripts of them were immediately publiſhed and diſperſed into as many hands as poſſible, into the hands of enemies as well as friends; and to render them ſtill more known, more generally underſtood and more uſeful, they were ſoon tranſlated in-

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to many different languages. Every individual Chriſtian thought himſelf intereſted in them, procured a copy of them if he could, committed them to his memory, regarded them as the ſole foundation of his faith, reverenced them as his only vindication for falling off from the religion of his forefathers, and watched over them with a holy earneſtneſs, as over his choiceſt treaſures. They have been conſtantly and continually appealed to as the ſacred and infallible oracles of God by all nations, ſects, factions and parties, in all ages and places wherever chriſtianity has been profeſſed. Both orthodox and hereticks, however irreconcileably they may have differed in the ſenſe and meaning of certain parts of theſe writings, have, nevertheleſs, with one common conſent, acknowledged their genuine and divine authority, referring their various diſputes, unſucceſsfully indeed, to their deciſion.

deciſion. Even the profeſſed enemies of Chriſtianity, whether Jews or Gentiles, in their contentions with the early propagators and defenders of the chriſtian religion, have never called the authenticity of theſe records in queſtion. Is not, then, a claim ſo uninterrupted, ſo univerſal, ſo unanimous and ſo conſtant, ſufficient to eſtabliſh the genuineneſs of the books of the New Teſtament? And can volumes ſo circumſtanced, as theſe were even from their firſt publication, and guarded with ſo ſevere and holy a jealouſy, poſſibly be corrupted in any eſſential point of doctrine or fact? Either, therefore, we muſt allow that theſe writings are really ſuch as they are generally taken for, that is, that they were written by the ſeveral evangeliſts and diſciples of Chriſt, according to their titles; or we muſt aſſert, that nothing left us by antiquity can be known to be true, that nothing left us by antiquity is credible. Different readings, undoubtedly,

edly, there are in theſe books in no ſmall numbers; nor could it eaſily have happened otherwiſe, as the tranſcribers of them muſt frequently have been ignorant men, and not always attentive to the buſineſs they were engaged in; but theſe numerous variations of the written copies from one another, (as is well known to, and acknowledged by, every competent judge of theſe matters,) tend rather to amend and reſtore the true reading of the original text, than to change and corrupt it. They are principally in the grammatical conſtruction; in the manner of ſpelling or placing the words, and in other unimportant matters, relative to ornament and ſound, rather than to the ſenſe. For let us chooſe as perverſely as we can amongſt all theſe variations of the text, and we ſhall not be able to ſelect a ſingle different reading, which, if admitted, will introduce any material change, either in the doctrinal or preceptive part of the chriſtian religion; or

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which will render doubtful any of the principal facts, upon which our faith is founded.*

LXV. I am not here going to enquire into the exact number of the canonical books of the New Teſtament; nor to examine into the reaſons of the decrees, which have been made upon this ſubject by the early councils of Chriſtianity; nor to expatiate upon the moral and intellectual abilities of thoſe ancient fathers of the church, by whom theſe volumes have been univerſally, unanimouſly and conſtantly quoted, explained and handed down to us as of divine authority. Theſe and other diſquiſitions of a ſimilar nature, though curious, entertaining and uſeful in their proper place, are certainly not neceſſary in the general review, which we are here making, of the grounds and reaſons of Chriſtianity. All that we want to be fully convinced of, in the preſent enquiry, is,

* See Dr. *Bentleys Phileleutherus Lipſienſis.*

is, whether there be evidence ſufficient to demonſtrate, that there ever exiſted ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt; that he inſtituted a new religion in conſequence of an immediate revelation, which he claimed to have received from God; that he worked miracles in atteſtation of the authority of this commiſſion, and that he roſe from the dead, as he had foretold, after having been ignominiouſly crucified by the Jews——For if we are entirely ſatisfied of the truth of theſe fundamental propoſitions, the reſt will follow of courſe; we muſt believe, and confeſs, that this Chriſt was ſent from God to lead mankind into the way of truth and happineſs; and, if we will act conſiſtently with this faith, we muſt live the lives of Chriſtians. And ſo great is the cloud of witneſſes which may be produced from the New Teſtament in atteſtation of theſe ſeveral facts, that it is, I think, quite impoſſible for any candid and impartial enquirer ſeri-

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ouſly to doubt concerning the truth of them. They are either diſtinctly related, or plainly alluded to in every book of the New Teſtament; not in the Goſpels, or in the Acts, or in the Epiſtles only, but in all theſe different writings of different authors, and that not once or twice, in paſſing as it were, but frequently, uniformly and invariably. We have, moreover, the uninterrupted voice of tradition in confirmation of them; we have the univerſal conſent of every congregation of Chriſtians, whereſoever diſperſed over the world, acknowledging and appealing to them, as the baſis of their faith; and we have the moſt ſubſtantial monuments, inſtituted in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, and continually obſerved in commemoration and atteſtation of them, ſuch as baptiſm, the ſupper of the Lord, and the Chriſtian paſſover. Every ſect and party of Chriſtians, various as they are and mutually diſagreeing in all other reſpects, equally confeſs

them to be true, inſiſting upon, and arguing from them as ſuch. That Jeſus Chriſt performed many extraordinary works, during his abode upon earth, was allowed by every enemy of his religion, both Jew and Gentile, who endeavoured to account for them either by natural means, or by magick, or by a diabolical interpoſition—And, to complete the important argument, ſuch has been the religious ſtate of a great part of mankind, ſince the period of Chriſts coming into the world, as cannot, I humbly apprehend, be otherwiſe accounted for, than upon the ſuppoſition of the reality of the miracles performed by Chriſt and his apoſtles.

LXVI. In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæſar, the whole world, as far as we are acquainted with its ancient hiſtory, were either Pagans or Jews; were either devoted to the worſhip of material repreſentations of the gods, or acknowledged the law of Moſes,

Moſes, as their only rule of duty and religious obedience. And behold! within twenty years afterwards, a new religion introduced and forcing its way with amazing ſucceſs into almoſt every province of the Roman empire. Now if this be a fact, which cannot be diſputed, is it not reaſonable to enquire, how ſo extraordinary an event was produced, and by what powerful and ſufficient means this important revolution in the religious ſtate of mankind was effected? Was, then, the ſudden, and wide diffuſion of Chriſtianity oweing to the ignorance of the times when it was firſt publiſhed, and to the meanneſs of the underſtanding, the weakneſs and incapacity of the perſons, to whom it was originally taught? certainly not. For the theatre, upon which the apoſtles principally acted, was the moſt learned, the beſt-inſtructed and civilized part of the earth. Their diſcourſes were directed to nations, where philoſophy, depth of thought, and the li-

beral arts had made a conſiderable progreſs. They performed their miracles; they preached and made converts to the faith of Chriſt not merely in the obſcure villages and towns of Judea, but in the famous cities of Antioch, Corinth, Theſſalonica, Athens, and in Rome itſelf the ſeat of literature, and even in Cæſars houſhold. We know, indeed, as well from other inſtances as from the ſpeedy and extenſive propagation of Mohammediſm, what mighty and quick changes have been brought about in the religion of ſtates by the arms even of a few enthuſiaſts, actuated (as they imagined) by the Spirit of God, and firmly perſuaded, that the joys of Paradiſe would be the certain reward of a merit, founded upon their zealous endeavours to ſubdue all the reſt of the world to the ſame mode of faith with themſelves—But the apoſtles of Chriſt (though their deſign was no leſs than to turn all nations, whitherſoever they came, to the belief of the di-

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vine miſſion of their Maſter) utterly diſclaimed, both in word and in deed, all violent and harſh methods of proceeding; all force and compulſion upon the human conſcience, and all converſions made by the terror of puniſhment and the ſword. The weapons of their warfare were the reaſonableneſs of the doctrines which they delivered, the authority of the high name by whoſe commiſſion they preached, and the miraculous works which they were enabled to perform; nor did they uſe any other arms to conquer the virulence of their enemies and to gain proſelytes to the faith, except patience, meekneſs, humility, ſubmiſſion to civil power in all things lawful, and univerſal good will to mankind. Primitive Chriſtianity had none of thoſe gaudy ſhews, or of that outward pomp of rites and ſplendour of ceremonies, which are ſo apt to attract the eyes and admiration of the multitude, and which, we may be ſure, it would not have been entirely

without, had it been cunningly-deviſed by worldly politicians: on the contrary, it was plain, ſimple, unadorned, clear and intelligible to every capacity, without any allurement to invite believers, but its own intrinſick excellence, and the evidence of miracles.

LXVII. The apoſtles, inſtead of falling in with the deeply-rooted prejudices of their Jewiſh hearers, denounced unto them a ſuffering Meſſiah, whoſe kingdom was purely ſpiritual, and whoſe laws were righteouſneſs; they proclaimed the approaching abolition of the Moſaick diſpenſation, the deſtruction of their city and temple, and the acceſſion of the Gentiles to all the privileges of the peculiar people of God. So again, inſtead of labouring to convert the heathen nations by indulging them in practices inconſiſtent with the doctrines of the goſpel, by compromiſing the difference between the two religions, and melting them down into one, they abſolutely forbad them to retain

retain the leaſt communication, or to have any fellowſhip with thoſe favourite idols, whom they had hitherto been taught to look up to, as the founders, benefactors and guardians of their ſeveral ſtates. To their proſelytes, in general, the only promiſe which they made with regard to the preſent world, was the divine comfort and ſupport under the variety of hardſhips, perſecutions and death, which would aſſuredly attend their ſincere confeſſion of the faith; nor were they to expect happineſs in that future ſtate, which was approaching, unleſs they acted conſiſtently with what they profeſſed to believe; unleſs they were zealous to adorn their new religion with good works, and uniformly complied with the will of God, in contradiction to all thoſe corrupt inclinations, and vicious paſſions, in which they had hitherto been unreflectingly, indulging themſelves. As in the diſcipline of the goſpel, the ſupremeſt bliſs of heaven was aſſigned to

the faithful and obedient Chriſtian; ſo was eternal miſery pronounced, in the holy oracles, as the certain lot and portion of thoſe indolent, wicked and careleſs ſervants, who knew their Maſters will, and did it not. And yet, notwithſtanding this conduct of the apoſtles, ſo contrary to the arts and maxims of religious miſſionaries; notwithſtanding all the difficulties, diſcouragements and obſtacles, which ſtood in the way of the propagation of the goſpel; notwithſtanding the continued oppoſition, which it met with from the learning and ſubtlety of the philoſophers; from the artifices and influences of the prieſts; from the bigotry and ſuperſtition of the vulgar; from the power of the magiſtrate and the vicious appetites and paſſions of all, without a ſingle worldly advantage to recommend it—within twenty years after it was firſt preached, it had gained vaſt multitudes of converts of all ranks and conditions, high and low, learned

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and unlearned, ſo that large congregations of the faithful were eſtabliſhed in almoſt every flouriſhing city of the Roman empire. That, therefore, the deſpiſed doctrine of a crucified lawgiver prevailed ſo univerſally againſt the allurements of fleſh and blood, the blandiſhments of the world, the writings of the learned and the perſecution of the great and powerful, will ever be regarded by all competent judges as an irrefragable argument that its original was divine, and its Protector almighty.

LXVIII. To reform a few corruptions in the religion of a nation, and to make material alterations in the eſtabliſhed worſhip even of a ſingle people, has always been looked upon as a work of the utmoſt difficulty, which may be attempted a hundred times without ſucceſs, and can never be accompliſhed without an extraordinary concurrence of circumſtances. But to perſuade many nations, all different from one another in their

the faithful and obedient Chriſtian; ſo was eternal miſery pronounced, in the holy oracles, as the certain lot and portion of thoſe indolent, wicked and careleſs ſervants, who knew their Maſters will, and did it not. And yet, notwithſtanding this conduct of the apoſtles, ſo contrary to the arts and maxims of religious miſſionaries; notwithſtanding all the difficulties, diſcouragements and obſtacles, which ſtood in the way of the propagation of the goſpel; notwithſtanding the continued oppoſition, which it met with from the learning and ſubtlety of the philoſophers; from the artifices and influences of the prieſts; from the bigotry and ſuperſtition of the vulgar; from the power of the magiſtrate and the vicious appetites and paſſions of all, without a ſingle worldly advantage to recommend it—within twenty years after it was firſt preached, it had gained vaſt multitudes of converts of all ranks and conditions, high and low, learned

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languages, manners and cuſtoms, entirely to quit the religion of their anceſtors for an abſolutely new mode of faith and practice; and to induce whole kingdoms to deſpiſe and forſake the deities, whom their forefathers had been immemorially accuſtomed to reverence and adore, has ſomething in it, which muſt appear little leſs than naturally impoſſible to him, who has well conſidered the ſtrength of prejudices founded in education, and the inflexible ſtubborneſs of ſuperſtition. The man, therefore, who can perſuade himſelf to believe, that ſuch perſons, as the apoſtles of Chriſt, were able, by the ſtrength of their own natural powers, to have invented ſuch an inſtitution as Chriſtianity, without the aſſiſtance of that extraordinary revelation from heaven, which, they aſſure us, they were favoured with—or, that they could have drawn ſuch ſtriking pictures of virtue, innocence and true magnanimity, as are extant in their works, unleſs they had

had cloſely copied from the life itſelf—or, that they could have dared to have deſcribed, and appealed to, a ſeries of miracles ſo materially circumſtantial as to times, places and names, and ſo utterly unlike any thing of the ſame kind, which had ever been heard of before either in the Jewiſh or pagan hiſtory, unleſs they had had the facts themſelves before their eyes to have directed their pens; or, that they could have ever carried ſo extenſive a plan of religious communion into effect with ſuch an aſtoniſhing rapidity of ſucceſs, unleſs God had been with them, in the manner they mention, confirming and bearing witneſs to the truth of their teſtimony by ſigns and wonders following—or, that ſuch vaſt numbers of all ranks, degrees, qualities and accompliſhments, ſhould be converted to a ſyſtem of religious notions and practices, contrary to all their worldly views and intereſts, without thoroughly examining the facts, upon which this ſyſtem was

founded,

founded, and without being able to have detected the impoſture, had there been one—The man, I ſay, who can perſuade himſelf unfeignedly to believe all this, cannot, I am ſure, be ſaid to want credulity, whatever elſe he may be deficient in, candour, I mean, impartiality, ingenuous freedom of thought and a ſincere love of truth, with a reſolution to follow its divine light, whitherſoever its bright beams ſhall point the ſacred way. And, conſequently, an infidelity ſo unreaſonable as is here ſuppoſed, a blind, careleſs, ſelf-ſufficient and unexamining infidelity, cannot but be highly criminal in the ſight of that Being, who has furniſhed us with the proper powers to ſearch out his whole will, and will certainly demand a ſtrict account both of the neglect, and of the abuſe, of the talents, which he has committed to our charge. Every effect, in the moral as well as natural world, calls for an adequate cauſe of its production, nor will a man of reaſon and wiſdom

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reſt ſatisfied in his enquiries, till he be arrived at ſuch ſufficient cauſe. If then, in the inſtance before us, we ſuppoſe, that Chriſt and his apoſtles did really perform the extraordinary works, which, we are told, they performed, the riſe, growth and progreſs of Chriſtianity will be plain and eaſily accounted for; nor ſhall we be involved in a ſeries of difficulties, which, without ſuch a ſuppoſition, will ever remain inexplicable and incomprehenſible. In that caſe, we ſhall no longer wonder at the ſwift-ſpreading propagation of the goſpel; we ſhall not wonder, that every honeſt, impartial, enquiring and attentive lover of truth, who either ſaw theſe mighty works himſelf, or was convinced by other evidence, that they really had been done, ſhould immediately riſe ſuperiour to all ſecular conſiderations and prejudices; and, notwithſtanding the certain hazard which, he knew, his ſincerity would incur, ſhould become the faithful diſciple of Chriſt, and obey his com-

commands, as the commands of one ſent by God, in an extraordinary manner, for the inſtruction and everlaſting benefit of mankind.

LXIX. Thus far have we conſidered and examined, with all poſſible caution, circumſpection and impartiality, the external evidence, which may be urged in favour of the Chriſtian religion; that it was originally revealed from heaven; that its doctrines and precepts are the genuine ſuggeſtions of a divine inſpiration, and that it has been faithfully tranſmitted to poſterity in the writings of the evangeliſts and apoſtles. And can you now ſay, upon the ſerious and attentive reflection, either that the arguments, which have been produced, are not the beſt and moſt proper to prove the ſeveral points, as they came before you; or, that they have appeared to you, in any point, defective and inſufficient? If miracles are univerſally confeſſed to be a ſatisfactory and unequivocal atteſtation of the immediate pre-

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ſence and interpoſition of almighty God, in favour of the divine authority of him, who is ſuffered to perform them; whatever definition of miracles you fix upon, ſuch will be allowed to be the extraordinary works done by Chriſt and his apoſtles. And, moſt ſure I am, if hiſtorical evidence of the exiſtence of paſt events can, in any caſe whatever, be admitted, it muſt be admitted in favour of the events, upon which Chriſtianity is founded. For there is not a ſingle circumſtance wanting, which the moſt curious, difficult and inquiſitive enquirer can reaſonably call for, to prove the authenticity of the principal and moſt eſſential doctrines, precepts and miracles of the goſpel. Too careful indeed, I own, you can hardly be in a matter of ſo much conſequence to your greateſt happineſs; nor can you, perhaps, take too many precautions, before you fully reſign your faith even to the beſt-grounded claim of a traditionary revelation. Was, indeed, a divine revelation

lation to be made immediately to yourſelf with all that blaze of conviction, with which the Father of light and truth would, probably, accompany it, you would aſk no other evidence to aſſure you, that ſuch a revelation would be, in every reſpect, worthy the all-perfect Being from whom it was derived; and, conſequently, you would pay, at once, the moſt unreſerved reverence and ſubmiſſion to the high information, without further examination, and without delay. Nor, were you to ſee a ſeries of miracles performed with your own eyes, in ſupport of a particular ſyſtem of doctrine, would you think it neceſſary to demand any other arguments to convince you, that the performer was aſſiſted by heaven, and that it was your indiſpenſable duty to believe, and to obey, whatever he ſhould deliver to you in the name of the holy Being, who had enabled him, without controul or contradiction, to work theſe miracles in your ſight. But this

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not being your caſe, nor the caſe of any part of mankind, at preſent, to the external proof in atteſtation of the truth of a traditionary revelation, you have a right likewiſe to join, what is uſually and properly called, the internal evidence; you have an undoubted claim to examine the doctrines and precepts themſelves by thoſe rules of right reaſon, which you know to be the will of God, before you haſtily reſolve either to believe the one, or to obey the other. For though the reaſonableneſs and excellent tendency of a religious ſyſtem of faith and practice will not, alone, be ſufficient to prove that ſuch religious ſyſtem was, in fact, revealed from heaven in an extraordinary manner; yet if ſuch inſtitution, after the moſt nice and accurate trial, appear to have all the marks and proofs of a divine revelation, which a divine revelation, ſuppoſing it to be true, could reaſonably be imagined or expected to have—ſuch intrinſick goodneſs will yield a ſtrong preſumption in its favour,

favour, and afford no ſmall aid to the hiſtorical teſtimonies, which may be ſeparately urged in its ſupport, and both together will amount to little leſs than an abſolute demonſtration, that ſuch religious ſyſtem was really revealed by God in an extraordinary manner.

LXX. Though it be not difficult to conceive, that, in our preſent imperfect ſtate of exiſtence and knowledge, a new revelation of Gods will, diſtinct from that which is diſcovered to every man by the light of reaſon, ſhould contain ſome things (in the doctrinal part eſpecially) hard to be underſtood and fully explained: yet thus much is certain, that it can, in no reſpect whatever, contradict any former diſcovery, which God may have made of his will either ordinary or extraordinary; that it muſt be in all things harmoniouſly conſiſtent with itſelf; that its *end* muſt be perfective of the human nature, and its *means* practicable, and well adapted to promote that trueſt glory of God,

God, which reſults from the higheſt happineſs of his creatures. Let it be obſerved, however, that it is by no means reaſonable to expect, that ſuch a revelation ſhould comprehend a true ſyſtem of the mechanical conſtitution of the viſible world; that it ſhould treat of things, either moral or natural, with a philoſophical preciſion and exactneſs; that it ſhould depart from the uſual phraſeology of the age, or country, wherein it is publiſhed, and introduce a new ſet of terms, equally unknown to the wiſe and vulgar; or that it ſhould adapt itſelf to the faſhionable ſyſtems of logick and rhetorick, taught in the ſchools of the learned. For ſuch a deviation from the common and received notions and language, in circumſtances not eſſential to the great ends for which the revelation was intended, would anſwer no good purpoſe at all; but, on the contrary, would draw off the attention both of the hearer and reader from the more intereſting matters of religion and morality,

to fix them upon ſubjects, which did not ſo intimately concern them, and of which the exacteſt knowledge would not, of itſelf, render them either better or more happy men. The great end of all Gods revelations, whether ordinary or extraordinary, being to make men wiſe unto ſalvation; if nothing be wanting to accompliſh this end, there can be no reaſon to complain, that the ſtile of our inſtruction is rude and unpoliſhed, or that the common methods of arguing are not obſerved. He who undertakes to teach others, and has no authority beſides that which he can obtain by raiſing in them a good opinion of his underſtanding and abilities, ſhould omit none of thoſe arts of perſuaſion, which ingenious and learned men have ſo advantageouſly cultivated, that he may ſet truth in the faireſt light: but he who comes from God, and to whom God bears teſtimony, has no occaſion for theſe methods of gaining credit. He ought to be heard with reve-

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rence and ſubmiſſion, though his bodily preſence ſhould be weak, and his ſpeech contemptible. His natural imperfections are, in one reſpect, a recommendation of him, as they tend to prove, that his doctrines are not of his own invention. *

LXXI. How far, then, the Chriſtian inſtitution has this internal evidence in proof and vindication of the divinity of its original; how far its ends and motives, its doctrines and duties are agreeable to our beſt notions of the Deity, ſuitable to the dictates of right reaſon and conducive to the perfection and happineſs of mankind, we ſhall ſoon be able to judge from the general review, which we will now go on to take, of its nature, ſpirit and tendency, as it was taught by Chriſt himſelf, and by his apoſtles in his name. The religion of the goſpel is the religion of perſons, who, being placed in a ſtate of trial and probation, often fall from their integrity. It is the religion of ſinners, and

* See *Biſhop of Londons diſcourſes.*

is mercifully intended both to give us infallible aſſurances of our future immortality in another ſtate, and likewiſe to eaſe us of all anixety, on account of our frequent tranſgreſſions of the law, by pointing out to us the efficacious means, by which God vouchſafes to accept our ſincere repentance, to blot out our paſt guilt, and to be entirely reconciled to us. The religion of the goſpel is deſigned to fill us with a holy ambition to obey the divine will in all things, and to declare, from the higheſt authority, both what we are to believe, and what we are to do, in order to obtain ſalvation. With this view and for theſe gracious purpoſes, at the time appointed by infinite wiſdom, God in an extraordinary manner ſent his beloved Son into the world (whoſe coming had been long foretold by the Jewiſh prophets under the character of the Meſſiah) to inſtruct mankind, as his meſſenger, in every branch of their duty; to exhibit to them in his life, converſation and inſtructions,

ſtructions, a perfect model of univerſal piety, goodneſs and purity; to make an adequate atonement for their ſins by his own unſinning obedience to the divine commandments, and by his meritorious ſufferings and death; and to give to them a certain pledge and conviction of a future reſurrection, and of the happineſs prepared for good men hereafter, by his own reſurrection from the dead, aſcenſion into heaven, and exaltation to glory. We are moreover taught in the ſacred volumes of our faith, that in the name of Chriſt, as our only advocate, we are to offer up all our prayers and praiſes to the throne of grace; that, through his powerful mediation and interceſſion for us, we can alone hope to be juſtified in the ſight of God, and to obtain the favourable acceptance of our imperfect ſervices; that, in and through him, God is pleaſed to communicate to true believers the bleſſings of his grace, and the aids of his holy Spirit; and that he alſo is ap-

pointed to raiſe the dead, at the laſt day, to judge the world in his Fathers name, and to diſpenſe eternal rewards and puniſhments to all mankind, according to their works done in the fleſh. Such is the general plan and outlines of Chriſtianity, as it ſtands diſtinguiſhed from all other religions, and is propoſed to our belief in the records of the goſpel. Examine it well; bring it to the ſevereſt tribunal of candid and impartial reaſon; and then tell me, whether you can perceive any thing in it, which is not entirely reconcileable to the eſſential attributes of the Deity, his wiſdom, goodneſs, juſtice and righteouſneſs; any thing which is not perfectly agreeable to the nature and circumſtances of guilty man; and which is not well-adapted to raiſe in us every holy affection of reverence, love and gratitude, and to inflame our zeal, (by an unreſerved ſubmiſſion to the divine commands) to attain thoſe everlaſting manſions of bliſs, which are propoſed,

poſed, as the ultimate end of all our actions?

LXXII. If from the principal doctrines of Chriſtianity, we turn our eyes, in the next place, to the rule of life, which it has laid down for the direction of its followers—here we ſhall find every thing taught, recommended and enforced, which is right, fitting and decent in itſelf; every thing which is amiable, beneficial and laudable—here we ſhall find every thing preſſed upon our obedience, which is worthy the divine Being, and ſuitable to his great deſign of glorifying himſelf in the common happineſs of all his creatures. The goſpel of Chriſt is one continued leſſon of the ſtricteſt morality, of piety, of juſtice, of benevolence, and of univerſal charity. The leading precepts of Chriſtianity being founded in the nature of man are, in general, plain, obvious, eaſy to be performed, and, in all things, conſonant to the voice of ſound reaſon. They require

no extraordinary auſterities; no irregular ſtrains of devotion; no unintelligible ecſtacies; no perverſe and wayward contradiction to the innocent cuſtoms of the world; no petulant gainſaying of civil authority in matters indifferent: but are, in all things, gentle, modeſt, peaceable, humble and obedient to lawful ſuperiours. Chriſtianity utterly rejects all envy, pride, malice, arrogance and ſelf-wiſdom. With reſpect to the almighty Creator of the univerſe, our indulgent Parent, our righteous Governour and continual Benefactor, it particularly enjoins the moſt ſincere and uniform love, reverence, gratitude, truſt, reſignation, devction, obedience and repentance. To our fellow-creatures it commands us to be univerſally benevolent, compaſſionate, placable, beneficent, meek, peaceable, candid and courteous. Nor can any precepts, relative to the duty we owe ourſelves, be productive of more real pleaſure and delight to us, than are thoſe of being humble

ble and modeſt in our opinions of ourſelves; calm and compoſed in our paſſions; ſober and temperate in our enjoyments; and patient and contented in our ſtations; all which the Chriſtian doctrine frequently and earneſtly inculcates No other method can raiſe us ſo near to heaven and happineſs, whilſt we are upon earth, as that which the goſpel points out to us, namely, to abſtract and elevate our minds above the fading glories, the unſtable poſſeſſions and vaniſhing delights of the preſent life, and to fix our thoughts, affections and hopes upon the glories of that future ſtate, which ſhall be revealed hereafter. And may we not add, in the laſt place, that it is amongſt the peculiar excellencies of the Chriſtian religion, that, *in its original inſtitution*, it is pure from all ſuperſtitious alloy and uſeleſs encumbrances; that it inſiſts principally upon a rational and ſpiritual ſervice; that even the ritual laws, which it ordains, are few in number, decent in them-

themſelves, void of all pompous and theatrical repreſentations, and eaſy to be obſerved. The poſitive and external injunctions, which are preſſed upon the obedience of Chriſtians in the authentick records of the goſpel, the two ſacraments eſpecially, are wiſely deſigned as acceſſional means and aſſiſtances to us in our progreſs towards perfection; they are intended to teſtify our unreſerved obedience to the Author of our religion for his own ſake; and to keep us more attentive to, and punctual in, the obſervation of thoſe duties, which compoſe the weightier matters of the divine law.

LXXIII. Here, then, upon the attentive recollection of what has been juſt now ſaid, the candid reader will permit me once more to interrupt the progreſs of his meditations, by aſking him—Is this a true portrait of the religion of the goſpel? Is this a right and fair repreſentation of the nature, end and internal conſtitution of Chriſtianity? Has any thing

been

been added to the view, which has been here taken of the principal doctrines of the New Teſtament, which does not neceſſarily flow from a rational interpretation of Chriſts diſcourſes, and of thoſe of his apoſtles? Or, has any thing been omitted, which may juſtly be thought to detract from the perfection of the evangelical morality, and to render it leſs amiable, leſs explicit, or leſs practicable? What then are the genuine conſequences to be deduced from theſe obſervations? It certainly follows from hence, that there is an admirable union and connection between the external and internal evidence of our holy religion, and that the argument is complete in favour of its divine authority — It certainly follows from hence, that the Chriſtian inſtitution could not poſſibly be the product either of impoſture or enthuſiaſm; and that it is, in all reſpects, worthy the interpoſition of that almighty Being, from whoſe mercies to mankind it claims its high original.

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To put together all the wiſe and good precepts, which had ever been delivered by the wiſeſt men of every ſect, and of every preceding age; to improve and exalt theſe precepts to the higheſt degree of excellency and perfection; to ſeparate and lay aſide the ſuperſtitious opinions and practices, which had debaſed and corrupted the moral inſtructions of all the ancient philoſophers and lawgivers; to ſupply the ſalutary doctrines, wherein the religious inſtitutions of all nations had been hitherto altogether deficient; to blend the whole into a plain, entire and well-connected ſyſtem, upon the foundation of certain and conſiſtent principles; and, in the laſt place, nicely to adjuſt the exact quantity of evidence, which was neceſſary to convey this ſyſtem of doctrines and precepts to poſterity, as the revealed word of God—this is the peculiar character of the Chriſtian Religion—And can it enter into the heart of any man to conceive, that a poor illiterate mechanick, aſ-

ſiſted by a few untaught, deſpiſed, hated and perſecuted fiſhermen, all born in a land of bigotry, ſuperſtition and ignorance, could have contrived and executed ſo arduous an undertaking by the ſtrength of their own reaſon, meditations, invention and reſolution? The miraculous influences of almighty power and wiſdom may be as clearly diſcerned by the extraordinary operations of the mind, as by the extraordinary effects of the hands, or of any other of the external organs; nor can I be leſs certain, when I read with attention the doctrines and precepts of Chriſt and his apoſtles, and behold the amazing ſucceſs, which every where accompanied their preaching, that they were under the immediate and extraordinary aid and direction of heaven, than if I had actually ſeen them opening the eyes of a man born blind, or giving hearing to one, who had been deaf from his mothers womb. For the powers of the human mind, in the uſual and common courſe of Providence,

dence, have their true and proper limits, as much as thoſe of the body.

LXXIV. The foundation of Chriſtianity being thus wholly laid upon the exiſtence of certain facts, and the ſuperſtructure of our holy faith entirely raiſed upon the teſtimony of the evangeliſts and apoſtles, and the authenticity of the writeings of the New Teſtament: nothing can be more manifeſt, than that all attacks made upon the truth of this religion, which have not a direct tendency, either to deſtroy the exiſtence of the principal facts, upon which it is built, or to leſſen the credibility of the perſons, who bear witneſs to them, or to render the genuineneſs of the books, in which they are recorded, juſtly doubtful and ſuſpicious, are vain, impotent, and ineffectual; and ſerve for no other purpoſe, than to expoſe the unſkilfulneſs, or malice, of the unfair adverſary, who has recourſe to ſuch improper methods of offence. Until it can be demonſtrated, that Chriſtianity is unworthy

worthy the divine Being, and cannot poſſibly be of any ſervice to promote the greateſt happineſs of its profeſſors; until the rock of external evidence, upon which this religion is ſo ſolidly founded, be overturned: though the rains deſcend, the floods come, and the winds beat upon it with their ſevereſt fury, yet will it ever ſtand ſecure in defiance of the raging tempeſt——When, therefore, it is objected to Chriſtianity, that it cannot be a true revelation of Gods will, either becauſe it containeth ſome things in its doctrinal part obſcure, and not eaſy to be comprehended underſtood, and explained; or, becauſe it was not made known from the beginning of the world; or, becauſe it has not been univerſally publiſhed, and propagated amongſt all nations of the earth; or, becauſe it has not had that happy influence upon the moral behaviour of its profeſſors, in introducing the practice of univerſal righteouſneſs, as might have been expected from a ſyſtem of religion

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planned and diſcovered by God himſelf—How eaſy is it to point out the weakneſs, the impropriety, and the unſeaſonableneſs of all ſuch extrinſick objections, as they may juſtly be denominated? For though we ſhould admit them in their utmoſt force, and to their fulleſt extent; though we ſhould allow, that the doctrines of Chriſtianity (where they are deſcribing the wonderful counſels of the Deity in his diſpenſations towards the children of men) are perplexed with great difficulties; that no ſufficient reaſon can be aſſigned by us, why Chriſtianity did not make its appearance in the world earlier; why it has not been univerſally embraced, or why it has not had a more general, and better, effect upon the minds of its followers: yet, certainly, it would not follow even from theſe large conceſſions (which, however, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould make) that Chriſtianity is not an extraordinary revelation of the divine will unto mankind. It certainly

tainly would not follow from theſe premiſes, that Jeſus Chriſt was not born in the land of Judea in the reign of Auguſtus Cæſar; that he did not take upon him the character of the Jewiſh Meſſiah; that he did not endeavour to propagate a new religion in the name of almighty God, whoſe beloved Son he claimed to be; that he did not work many miracles in atteſtation of his divine miſſion; that he did not give to his apoſtles authority to make proſelytes to his doctrines in all nations; that the books of the New Teſtament are not the genuine works of the perſons whoſe names they bear; or that the doctrines and precepts of Chriſtianity have not a natural tendency to make the believers and practiſers of them both wiſer and better men. Follow, indeed, it will from theſe conceſſions, as from ten thouſand other inſtances, that we are extremely ſhort-ſighted, and that our intellectual powers are found weak and inefficient, whenever they attempt to fathom the

deep and hidden things of God. But ſurely no modeſt man, no man of ſound underſtanding, will venture to aſſert, that an infinitely wiſe and powerful Being can have no good reaſons for his conduct towards mankind, but we muſt ſee and be made acquainted with them: or, that our not being able to aſſign a ſufficient cauſe for a fact, of whoſe exiſtence we can have no doubt, is a ſatisfactory evidence, or even preſumption, that ſuch cauſe cannot be aſſigned. To argue, therefore, either againſt the truth of Chriſtianity in general, or of any particular doctrines delivered in the Scripture hiſtory, becauſe we cannot completely account for them, agreeably to our preſent notions of things, and becauſe they do not exactly correſpond with our own experiences and narrow conceptions, is juſt as wiſe and as juſtifiable, as it would be for a perſon born and educated in a cave under ground without having ever ſeen the light of the ſun, or the earth, or heavens, or the animals and

vegetables,

vegetables, which are in the world, to deny the exiſtence of theſe things, only becauſe he had never ſeen them himſelf, though he had the teſtimony of a multitude of the moſt unexceptionable witneſs to confirm their exiſtence to him. There are as great difficulties, and propoſitions as hard to be comprehended, underſtood and explained in the phyſical, as there are in the religious world! Shall we therefore become atheiſts, becauſe we know not how to account for the works of the creation, how they were, at firſt, produced out of nothing, and how they are, at preſent, continued in being?

LXXV. Whenever, therefore, we find ourſelves preſſed with objections of this nature againſt our holy religion, taken either from our mere ignorance of the reaſons of the conduct of divine Providence, or from our deficient and inadequate conceptions of things; inſtead of being too anxious in our ſearch of ſolu-

tions, and of indulging ourſelves in philoſophical ſpeculations concerning them; inſtead of ſuffering them to make too ſtrong an impreſſion upon our doubting minds, let us rather think it our wiſdom, as we ſhall certainly find it to be our trueſt intereſt, to argue upon the important ſubject in the following manner. We believe, that in the fullneſs of time God ſent his Son into the world made of a woman, to teach mankind both by precept and example, how they might beſt and moſt effectually ſerve their Creator. We believe, likewiſe, that Jeſus Chriſt was the true Meſſiah promiſed in the ancient Jewiſh ſcriptures; that he is the one Mediator between God and man; and that he laid down his life for the redemption and ſalvation of all truly-repenting ſinners. We believe, alſo, that the influence of the Holy Spirit is ever ready to aſſiſt us in our earneſt endeavours after the acquiſition of that true holyneſs, which is made the baſis of

Chriſtianity,

Chriſtianity, and without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord. But why do we believe theſe and other points of doctrine, which are diſcovered in the New Teſtament, and which diſtinguiſh the faith of a Chriſtian from that of all the world beſides? Not becauſe we are able fully to inform ourſelves, why man was created in ſuch a manner, as, after having fallen from his original perfection, to ſtand in need of a Saviour: or why the ſeed of Abraham was ſelected to be the ſource of the Meſſiah, preferably to all other families of the earth: not becauſe we can conceive a clear notion of the doctrines of redemption, juſtification and divine aſſiſtance, or can deſcribe the manner of their operation ſcientifically: not becauſe we have an adequate perception of the nature of inſpiration, or have ſagacity ſufficient to anſwer all the perplexing queſtions, with which a peeviſh and ſubtle metaphyſician may be able to preſs us upon theſe intereſting ſubjects—But

we profeſs to believe them, becauſe we find theſe articles propoſed to our faith in thoſe books, which (we are entirely convinced by a ſeries of the moſt indiſputable evidence) were originally compoſed under the direction and influence of the divine Being; and which, upon that account, we are indiſpenſably obliged to reverence and to obey as the infallible oracles of God. For the ſame reaſon, which tells us that we are to believe nothing as coming from God, which is inconſiſtent with his perfections, which manifeſtly contradicts the teſtimony of our ſenſes, and is expreſsly repugnant to the natural connection of our ideas, whiſpers to us, likewiſe, that many things may be derived from the Fountain of light and truth, and may deſerve to be credited as ſuch, though they may be above and beyond our comprehenſion, and are not to be completely underſtood and explained in our preſent obſcure and imperfect view of things. Whatſoever, therefore,

therefore, is plainly proved to be of divine revelation by the moſt proper arguments, which the ſubject is capable of receiving, ought to over-rule all our opinions, prejudices and intereſts, and has a right to be embraced with full aſſent. For no propoſition can be more demonſtrated than this, that a doctrine taught by infinite wiſdom and truth is a true doctrine. Such a ſubmiſſion, as is here ſuppoſed, of reaſon to faith, takes not away the landmarks of knowledge, but leaves to us the diſtinct uſe of our ſeveral faculties, for which they were given to us. Reaſon, as was originally intended by the Author of our being, muſt be the laſt judge and guide in every thing. I do not mean, that we muſt conſult reaſon, and examine whether a propoſition revealed from God can be made out agreeably to our natural notions and principles, and if not, that then we are to reject it: but conſult it we muſt, and by it carefully examine, whether it be a reve-

lation from God, or not—And if reaſon finds it to be revealed from God, reaſon then declares for it, as much as for any other truth, which it has diſcovered by its proper medium, and makes it one of her dictates. Reaſonable men, therefore, having found nothing that makes the Chriſtian revelation inconſiſtent with itſelf, nor that is repugnant to any of the divine truths, which reaſon and the works of God demonſtrate to them, will never ſet up reaſon, in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehenſible as to their manner of being. If they did, their reaſon would be falſe and deceitful, they would ceaſe to be reaſonable men. *

LXXVI. Are we, then, blindly to ſurrender our aſſent, our religious faith, to the truth of propoſitions, where we cannot previouſly diſcern and demonſtrate the connection between the terms of which they conſiſt? Does not ſuch a

* *Lord Bolingbrokes works.*

conduct

conduct appear irrational, and will it not open a wide door for error, deluſion and impoſture to enter in at?——The man, who will neither believe nor act, but in caſes where he has a complete knowledge; he who will take nothing upon the report of others, nor give credit to any thing, of which he is not abſolutely certain by his own experience or the uſe of his own faculties, will paſs his time both uſeleſs to the world, and extremely diſagreeable to himſelf. Shall we not eat and drink, becauſe we know not how our food digeſts, and are not able to underſtand and explain the manner, how it turns to blood and nouriſhment? Shall we not make uſe of the phyſicians art, becauſe we do not comprehend the mechanical proceſs, by which his medicines will effect our cure? Such a conduct would be utterly ridiculous in common life, and the unhappy wretch who really argued after this manner, and behaved accordingly, would be undoubtedly recommended,

commended, by the common voice, to the charitable guardianſhip of his friends. Why then ſhould a conduct entirely ſimilar be thought more reaſonable in religious matters, than in others of far leſs importance? There are difficulties, it is acknowledged on all hands, there are certainly points myſterious, incomprehenſible and inexplicable in natural, as well as revealed religion; ſhall we then ſuſpend our duty, and have no religion, until all theſe things are rendered clear, plain and eaſy both to the wiſe and ſimple, to the learned and unlearned? We believe that there is a God, a Being of all imaginable perfections; but after what manner this ſelf-derived Being exiſts; how his foreknowledge is to be reconciled with human liberty; how he, who is in heaven above, can, at the ſame time, be about my path and about my bed, and yet be unextended, we are utterly ignorant, and ever ſhall continue ſo, till this mortal ſhall have put on immor-

tality,

tality, and we are permitted to ſee him, as he is. We believe, alſo, that a juſt, wiſe and good God will be a rewarder of them, who diligently ſeek him. But when is this retribution to commence? That it is not regularly conferred, in the preſent life, innumerable inſtances may aſſure us. It muſt be, therefore, after death. But how, and in what manner our ſouls can act, when ſeparated from thoſe bodies, whoſe inſtrumentality they now uſe; how we can recover all our former conſciouſneſs, and again become capable of pleaſure and pain, we know as little as we do of the moſt inexplicable propoſitions, which are found in the Chriſtian inſtitution. In all theſe points, and in many others of a like nature which might be mentioned, our ideas of the ſeveral terms, of which the propoſition conſiſts, are clear and diſtinct, and we are well able to judge of the validity of the proofs, which are brought to ſhew the mutual connection or diſunion of theſe ideas in a certain

certain reſpect, though it be confeſſedly beyond the extent of our preſent faculties to penetrate into every ſubtle nicety relating to them—We may, therefore, depend upon it, that, as we are created active rather than ſpeculative beings, neither natural nor revealed religion requires us to vex and torment ourſelves about queſtions, which can ſerve no valuable purpoſe, and which have no other tendency but to beget and maintain ſtrife and diſſentions, and to undermine both our faith and practice. Though ſpeculative curioſity, certainly, be not blameable, when it is reſtrained within the bounds of modeſty and evidence; yet is it much to be condemned, when it is immoderately indulged, and ſuffered to invade and influence our moral behaviour: when it renders us leſs active in paying the obedience, which is due to the whole will of our heavenly Father, and leſs charitable in bearing with the infirmities of our weaker brethren; and when, under

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the ſpecious pretence of examining and proving all things, it doubts all things, diſputes all things, and will find nothing good enough, in the whole compaſs of religion, for it to hold faſt.

LXXVII. But ſtill you aſk; if Chriſtianity be an inſtitution ſo neceſſary to advance the greateſt happineſs of mankind, why did not the merciful God ſend his Son into the world ſooner? and why are not the ſalutary doctrines of the goſpel equally communicated to all nations?— When you can tell, why God did not create the world and mankind infinite ages earlier than he did (ſince his goodneſs has been always unchangeably the ſame, and the ſooner the magnificent work was commanded into being, the greater would that goodneſs appear) then may you expect a full and ſufficient anſwer to the preceding queſtions. In the mean while, you will do well to ſuit your deſire of information to your preſent ſtate of imperfection, to enquire into the hidden counſels

ſels of God with caution, diſcretion and humility, and not to make your invincible ignorance upon theſe arduous points an argument for infidelity. As God is a Being of eſſential wiſdom, power and righteouſneſs, he muſt always do what is beſt and fitteſt to be done upon the whole; he muſt always act conſiſtently with his attributes; whatever he does muſt be right both in itſelf, and in all its attending circumſtances. If therefore you are convinced, by the evidence which has been ſo fully laid before you, that Jeſus Chriſt took upon him the appellation of the Son of God; that he gave a new religion to mankind in his Fathers name; that he worked many miracles in expreſs confirmation of this religion, and that his words and actions were authentically regiſtered, and are faithfully tranſmitted to you in the writings which compoſe the New Teſtament, ſurely you can be under no difficulty, nor can entertain any real doubt, about the propriety of the

merely

merely circumſtantial part, the time, I mean, the manner and the place of his coming: you can have no doubt, but that he came at the fitteſt ſeaſon for him to come; that the imperfect propagation of the goſpel is entirely reconcileable with the divine perfections; and your faith, notwithſtanding all theſe extrinſick objections, will ſtill remain firm and unſhaken.

LXXVIII. That Chriſtianity is of a late date in compariſon with the beginning of the world; and that a ſmall part only of the earth has been enlightened by the ſalutary influence of the goſpel, we are ready to allow; nor have judicious and ingenious men been wanting to aſſign good reaſons for the conduct of Providence with regard to this important tranſaction: but whatever may be thought of their ſpeculations, be they more or leſs ſatisfactory to the candid enquirer, ſurely it ill becomes thoſe perſons, to whom this extraordinary revelation of Gods will has been,

been, in fact, communicated, to think lightly of the favour, and to treat it with contempt, as derogatory to the divine goodneſs, merely becauſe it has not been made univerſal; merely becauſe ſo conſiderable a part of mankind are not rendered partakers of the ſame bleſſing. For if the condition, which the whole world was in, with reſpect to religion, before the comeing of Chriſt, was conſiſtent with the goodneſs of God, as every one who acknowledges that goodneſs muſt grant, certainly the moral ſtate of mankind is not leſs conſiſtent with it at preſent, the Gentiles having had no injuſtice done to them, by the publication of the goſpel, nor being thereby farther removed from happineſs, than they were before that memorable event. Sound reaſon will tell us upon this occaſion, that God is not obliged to communicate to all his creatures, even to all thoſe who are of the ſame ſpecies, equal degrees of moral or intellectual perfection, and an equal capacity and opportunity

portunity of attaining happineſs: and to aſſert that he is would be a profane diminution of his ſovereignty. Let us be duly thankful for the means, both ordinary and extraordinary, with which he has furniſhed us for improving our knowledge and happineſs; that he has not given the ſame advantages to other creatures would be a ſtrange reaſon either for our own denial of them, or for our not improving them to the utmoſt. God is certainly no reſpecter of perſons; nor can our moral and religious obligations to faith and obedience be greater and more extenſive, than is our moral and religious knowledge. This is the voice of right reaſon, and this is the undoubted doctrine of the ſacred oracles. Hence therefore it inconteſtably follows, nor do we deny the important conſequence, that the God of all the earth will do ſtrict juſtice; that he will render glory and honour and peace to every man that worketh good, and inflict tribulation and anguiſh upon

every ſoul of man that doth evil; that, in every country and amongſt every people, whoſoever ſhall turn from the wickedneſs which he hath committed, and do that which is lawful and right, ſhall ſave his ſoul alive; and that whoſoever tranſgreſſeth the law which he actually is, or may be, acquainted with by the proper exerciſe of the powers, which diſtinguiſh him from the brute creation, and does not ſincerely repent of the unrighteouſneſs, which he hath been guilty of, ſhall undoubtedly periſh everlaſtingly. Thus will God be juſtified in his ſayings, and overcome when he is judged.

LXXIX. What advantage then hath the Chriſtian more than the infidel, the believer than the unbeliever? or what doth it profit us to be Chriſts peculiar people? much every way. For if our happineſs in a future ſtate, as is highly probable, ſhall increaſe in proportion to what we know, believe and practiſe of our duty, upon a principle of obedience to the

will

will of God, in the preſent life; the conſequence is indiſputable, that the more we know, believe and practiſe of our duty here, ſo much the more pure and exalted will be our joys in the eternal manſions of bliſs hereafter. This then is the Chriſtians boaſting, and this our ſerious triumph, that the holy ſcriptures have made us fully acquainted with all the various relations, which we ſtand in to the divine nature, as our creator, preſerver, redeemer, and conſtant aſſiſtant in our progreſs towards perfection; that our whole duty is laid open to our view, and that we never can be ignorant of what is the good and acceptable will of our ſovereign Lord; that we have the ſtrongeſt motives of gratitude and intereſt to animate us to live up to the law of our being; and that we are filled with the comfortable aſſurance, that our merciful God and Father will receive our ſincere, though imperfect, endeavours to ſerve and pleaſe him, in and through the death and mediation of

his Son Jeſus Chriſt. The beſt Chriſtian muſt be the beſt, and conſequently upon the whole, will be the happieſt man. Let it not, therefore, be imagined, as is too often the caſe, that God arbitrarily aſſigns to Chriſtians a higher degree of happineſs than to others, without having a proper regard to their moral agency, and that this is the doctrine of the goſpel. On the contrary, the faith of ſincere Chriſtians is always directed to the right and beſt object, their piety is of the nobleſt kind, and their virtues the moſt pure and extenſive—To be uniformly engaged in an upright, benevolent, and religious courſe of action is the ſolemn vow and profeſſion of Chriſtians.

LXXX. But here let us indulge ourſelves a little longer upon this moſt agreeable and pleaſing of all reflections to a ſenſible-rational being, namely, the gradual increaſe of his happineſs, as the knowledge and practice of his duty increaſe. May we not then conjecture,

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and will not ſuch conjecture be attended with great probability, that our felicity even in that future ſtate, to which we are haſtening, will principally ariſe from a proportionable advancement in the perfection of our intellectual powers; from a more near, full, and comprehenſive view of the divine nature, of the harmony of his ſeveral attributes, and of the unerring wiſdom and goodneſs of all his diſpenſations? Will it not reſult from thoſe ſtronger motives of love, piety, gratitude and univerſal charity, which will, at that time, more forcibly operate upon us, and conſequently animate our purer and diſencumbered faculties to a more faithful, and punctual diſcharge of our duty? But if this be ſo, may we not venture to proceed one ſtep further in our reaſoning? may we not go on to argue, that the nearer we approach to this celeſtial ſtate during our abode upon earth, that is, that the more we have revealed unto us, and the more we know of the divine

Being and his attributes; of the grounds of the conduct of his providence; of the means appointed for our ſalvation; of the kingdom of heaven; of the purity of its inhabitants, and of that future glory, which ſhall never fade away: ſo much the clearer will our duty, in its full extent, lie open before us, ſo much the more cogent will be the motives to incite us to the regular practice of this duty, and, conſequently, ſo much the greater will be our happineſs both preſent and future? And, give me leave to add what, I am ſure, no ſeriouſly-thinking perſon will conteſt, ſo much the more inexcuſeable ſhall we be, if, through negligence, indolence or a corrupted heart, we enquire not into the grounds and reaſons of the chriſtian faith; if we conſult not with the utmoſt attention the books of the evangeliſts and apoſtles, and endeavour to learn from them what is the true and acceptable will of God, that we may uniformly and ſincerely obey it. For

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if the guilty heathen ſhall be requited ſeven-fold for his offences by the juſt and righteous Governour of the univerſe, certainly the puniſhment of the ſtubborn, unexamining, diſobedient and unrepenting nominal-chriſtian ſhall be multiplied ſeventy and ſeven fold.

LXXXI. Is not, then, the Almighty partial, or undiſcerning in his diſpenſations to the children of men? Is he not kinder to ſome people and nations, even where no previous merit can be ſuppoſed, than he appears to be to others? And what will you ſay of thoſe diſtinguiſhing marks of his favour, which the Jew formerly, and the Chriſtian now ſo juſtly glories in? Surely if it be no imputation to the goodneſs and juſtice of our common Parent, that he has created us men and not angels; that he has not given to all the ſame capacity and leiſure to know and learn their duty; that he has diſtributed the natural bleſſings of health, ſtrength, wealth and power by different

weights and meaſures: neither will it be deemed by any competent and diſpaſſionate judge a derogation from thoſe attributes, that ſome of his creatures are furniſhed with means, which, if made a proper uſe of, will render them happier than others, who have not been ſupplied with the ſame, or equal opportunities of improving themſelves. Could it, indeed, be ſhewn, that God Almighty would judge mankind in the laſt day, either for not believing what they had never been duly informed of, or for tranſgreſſing any duty, which they did not, and could not, know to be their duty, or that he would make them accountable for not being influenced by motives, which he never acquainted them with, in that caſe it would be difficult to reconcile ſuch a proceeding to the divine mercy and juſtice. But to thoſe who are fully convinced, that every good man, that every man who lives agreeably to the beſt knowledge of Gods will, which it is in his utmoſt power

power to procure, and is in an habitual courſe of charity, temperance and piety upon a principle of duty to the Lord of the univerſe, ſhall be at length made happy in proportion to his moral and religious improvements, no other arguments will be wanting to vindicate the honour of the divine attributes. As to the various degrees of happineſs, and the means of attaining them, theſe muſt be left with all humility and reſignation to the wiſe diſtribution of the God of all the earth, to the father of mercies and giver of all good gifts. But how many ſoever may be the manſions prepared for the ſouls of good men in another life; however numerous the claſſes of cherubim and ſeraphim may be, we know aſſuredly from the ſacred oracles, whoſe authority we devoutly revere, that all hatred, envy and malice; that all profaneneſs, irreligion and brutal indulgence of our paſſions, will be for ever baniſhed from the celeſtial regions, and that nothing but

love,

love, and harmony, and piety, and temperance, and humble obedience will be permitted to enjoy the happineſs of thoſe bleſſed abodes.

LXXXII It will not, therefore, be looked upon by thoſe, who, unſeduced by a pomp of words and a ſpecious ſhew of argument, know how to eſtimate the real and intrinſic value of things, as any objection to the truth and importance of our holy religion, that its precepts have ſo little influence upon the lives even of its warmeſt advocates; that crafty, ſelf-intereſted and ambitious men, (both of the clergy and laity) have frequently diſguiſed themſelves under its venerable appearance the more ſecurely to deceive mankind, and to prey upon their credulity; and that the annals both of civil and eccleſiaſtical hiſtory are full of the wars, tumults, rebellions and cruelties, which chriſtianity has occaſioned. For the crime in all theſe inſtances, the artifice, the impoſture,

poſture, the wickedneſs wholly belong to the profane hypocrites themſelves, who have ſo preſumptuouſly dared to ſport with things ſacred, and to ſacrifice their God to the momentary views of profit, power or revenge. Paſſion, whenever an opportunity offered, never yet wanted a pretext to indulge its favourite propenſity: and to imagine, that there have been more quarrels, diſputes and bloodſhed, ſince the eſtabliſhment of the Chriſtian religion, than there were before, is to be wholly ignorant of the hiſtory of mankind. Are there not continual ſtrifes, contentions, hatreds, animoſities and battles amongſt the nations, who have no other religion, but that which nature has pointed out to them? or do all men, whohave reaſon only for their guide in matters of morality, live agreeably to what they know and profeſs to be her genuine dictates? and becauſe they do not; becauſe they impiouſly and deteſtably abuſe her powers, ſhall we abſurdly conclude, that all her

deductions

deductions are falſe, and never to be depended upon; that our notions of God and his attributes are without foundation; that there is no truth in natural religion; and that mankind would, in the event, have been happier than they now are, had they never perplexed themſelves at all with their reflections upon theſe ſubjects? The ancient Roman commonwealth was overturned by Julius Cæſar under the ſpecious pretence of love to his country, and a zeal for her beſt intereſts; Britain, in the laſt age, was enſlaved by outcries for liberty; and, at this day, many are delivered to all the cruelties of the inquiſition, with proteſtations of the moſt diffuſive charity for the tendereſt concerns of the ſufferers—Are, therefore, the love of our country, juſt notions of civil liberty, and univerſal charity, to be traduced and proſcribed as mere names without a meaning, as criminal and pernicious to ſocieties? Naked miſchief is deformed and frightful; nor will any man

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be fool enough, or mad enough, to follow thoſe, who profeſs to lead him to open deſtruction. The hook therefore muſt be baited with ſomething, which is pleaſant, lovely, and attracting; the wolf within muſt put on the dreſs of the innocent lamb; and the falſe colours of benevolence, moderation, or pure religion are hung out to bring in prizes to infidelity, malice, ambition, revenge or perſecution. Moſt devoutly, indeed, is it to be wiſhed, that a religion, which leads, excites and encourages its profeſſors to aim at every kind of moral and intellectual perfection; which prevails on all wiſe men to purſue peace, piety and righteouſneſs; to be good neighbours, good friends, good ſubjects, and good in every various relation—moſt devoutly, I ſay, is it to be wiſhed, that ſuch a religion could exert its full power, and genuine influence over all mens hearts and lives; and that no one, who nameth the name of Chriſt, would act contrary to the known rules of his profeſſion by

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impiouſly affronting his Maker; by debauching himſelf, and by dealing injuriouſly with his neighbour. Happy then, compleatly happy ſhould we be as rational, as ſocial, and as immortal beings.

LXXXIII. Go then you, who are ſo ready to ſpeak againſt the goſpel of the benevolent Jeſus, to abuſe his doctrines, to attack his authority, and to vilify his ordinances; you, who deſpiſe the wiſdom of the wiſeſt in compariſon of the preſumptuous ſuggeſtions of your own underſtanding; you, who ſo dogmatically argue againſt dogmatizing; you, who under the flattering inſinuation of ſetting your fellow-creatures free from the galling fetters of prieſt-craft, and the heavy yoke of ſyſtematical theology, would overturn the ſureſt foundations of all that is juſt, and holy, and good—to you do I now particularly addreſs myſelf—Take our New Teſtament into your hands, the true and only teſt of the Chriſtian religion,

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and try the book with candour and impartiality by its own intrinſick merit: examine it page by page with your ſevereſt care, and moſt ſtrict attention—and then tell us, or rather anſwer yourſelves, where you find thoſe wrong notions of the Deity, and thoſe miſrepreſentations of his attributes, which you are but too apt to lay to its charge in your harangues to your credulous followers—and then tell us, where you find that covetouſneſs and ambition, that ſpirit of anger and revenge, that tyranny and oppreſſion, and that ſtubbornneſs and ſedition, which are the ſeeds of general wretchedneſs and miſery amongſt men? If you can any where read, that thoſe ſacred volumes give but a conſequential commiſſion, or encouragement to do injuſtice or violence; if they any where permit us to wound or to perſecute; to defraud or to deceive; to gripe or to extort; to calumniate or to revile; let them be diſcarded, at once, with the ſcorn and contempt

tempt of all good men. If they afford the leaſt motive or inducement to a diſregard of God, or ill will to man; to pride or luxury, to uncleanneſs or intemperance; if they any where allow us to build our pleaſures, or our fortunes upon our neighbours miſeries; if they give the leaſt indulgence to ſuperſtition, or place the eſſence of religion in mere obedience to external ordinances — then let not the enemies of theſe writings be defrauded of the glory of their perpetual oppoſition to them; we will acknowledge the impoſture, and ſeek ſome better, and more effectual, means of recommending ourſelves to the protection, favour and bleſſings of our God—But, on the contrary, if the ſacred code of our religious faith be crowded with precepts of piety and devotion; juſtice and charity; humility and modeſty; meekneſs and ſobriety; reſignation and contentment: if we are therein conſtantly inſtructed to believe in God, to depend upon his goodneſs, to

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call upon him in our neceſſities, and to glorify him in all things; if we are uniformly encouraged in almoſt every line of thoſe writings to do all the good we can to our fellow-creatures; to obey the powers that are in authority over us; to honour our ſuperiours; to love all mankind and to forgive our enemies; to be publick-ſpirited and followers of peace; to be ſatisfied with our own; to be diligent in our ſeveral ſtations and callings, and to do to others, as we would wiſh ſhould be done unto ourſelves in ſimilar circumſtances—ſuch an inſtitution will ſurely be allowed by every friend of peace, righteouſneſs and mankind to be of the utmoſt benefit to the tranquillity and well-being of civil government—And with the greateſt confidence may it be aſſerted, that they who labour to ſtop the progreſs of ſo uſeful, and ſo extenſively-benevolent a ſyſtem (if that be the name under which the doctrines and precepts of Chriſtianity are to be comprehended) and to

procure its diſbelief and diſgrace, are enemies of the true intereſt of their country in general, as well as of the greateſt happineſs of individuals in particular.

LXXXIV. But we will argue this matter ſtill more cloſely—Every wiſe man propoſes to himſelf ſome end in his undertakings; a wiſe man has always ſome rational view, or proſpect, before him either to excite, or to reward his labours. But what valuable purpoſe can you intend to ſerve, by oppoſing the Chriſtian inſtitution, and ſpeaking evil of the goſpel? Would you, as the vain Epicurus formerly boaſted, would you deliver the world from the fear of a God! But this is ſuch a deliverance, as dragging the helpleſs infant from the boſom of its affectionate parent, and expoſing it to all the dangers and miſeries of deſertion; it is ſetting a man free from the advice aud protection of his ableſt, ſureſt and beſt friend; it is depriving the human ſoul of its moſt ſolid comfort, its pureſt joy and beſt hope. But

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after all which you can attempt, utterly to extinguiſh this fear will certainly be found an atchievement much too difficult for your ſtrongeſt efforts to accompliſh. The idea of a perfectly-wiſe, juſt and omnipotent being, when it has once gotten poſſeſſion of the human breaſt, can never afterwards be intirely removed; it will be continually ready to return with freſh force, whenever we are involved in any danger, and will take every advantage to attack us in calamity, in pain, or in the vapours. And if not; I mean, could the belief and fear of a God be quite baniſhed from our ſouls, what would be the conſequence of ſuch a victory over this moſt fundamental article of faith? it would be ſucceeded by fears more laſting, more affecting and unavoidable, namely, the fear of one another. For if there be not a God, who inſpecteth, ruleth and judgeth in the earth, there can be no ſure ground of confidence in man. Were it not for the fear of God and his juſtice, we ſhould have

perpetual occaſion to tremble for our pockets, our modeſty, or our throats.

LXXXV. Is it, then, for the better order and regulation of civil ſociety, that you firſt philoſophers, and publick-ſpirited diſputers of the age, are ſo fond of ſetting up each mans own experience, as the only ſure teſt of true and falſe, of right and wrong? Is it for the ſake either of your prince or your fellow-ſubjects, that you are ſo deſirous of introducing univerſal doubt, and of extirpating the notion of a revealed religion? This may, perhaps, be your wiſdom, but it is directly repugnant to the maxims of the ableſt politicians, who, in all ages and countries, have ſeen and confeſſed the abſolute neceſſity of this reſtraint upon the paſſions of mankind; have ever called it to their aſſiſtance in ſupport of government; and, where they have been deſtitute of real revelations from heaven, have been forced craftily to invent, and to pretend them, for

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the better maintenance of their own authority, and the common benefit of their people. No merely-human terrors are ſufficient to compel one man to want what he ſees another enjoy, or to induce him to prolong a wretched life in penury and miſery, unleſs he has the hopeful proſpect of greater advantages in another world: nor can caſes of property be ſecurely determined, titles decided, or criminals convicted, without ſuch witneſſes, as have a due dread of Gods diſpleaſure before their eyes. And may we not juſtly impute to the want of this dread that general diſſipation, corruption and diſſoluteneſs of manners, which are every where prevailing amongſt us, and which threaten not only the proſperity, but alſo the very being of this happy, free and independent nation? And yet you would perſuade us—you, who oppoſe the authority and influence of Chriſtianity, would perſuade us to look up to you, to reſpect and reverence you, as the men of

profound ſagacity and penetration; as the only impartial thinkers, as the beſt friends of your dear country, and the genuine aſſertors of the native privileges of mankind. But are you the friends of your country, who advance and publiſh ſuch notions, as have a natural tendency to introduce anarchy and confuſion? are you the noble champions of the dignity and juſt prerogatives of the human ſpecies, who are for reducing all animal nature to the ſame common ſtandard? and are you to be ranked in the claſs of ſound politicians, whoſe great ambition it is to propagate principles, which level the prince with the beggar; which, in their conſequences, deſtroy all property and credit, all commerce and honeſt induſtry; and which encourage the ſtronger and more crafty to deceive, plunder and defraud his weaker and unſuſpecting neighbour?

LXXXVI. Is then mere ſelfiſhneſs, and a view to your own private profit and advantage, the true motive of your conduct,

conduct, and the ſpring which gives ſo much activity to your zeal againſt Chriſtianity? certainly not. For if this were the caſe, you would not ſo fooliſhly ſtrive to overturn thoſe fences, which can alone ſecure to you the peaceable enjoyment of your eſtates, and even of your lives. Did you really ſtudy, and know, your own intereſt, though you had perceived a flaw in the religious eſtabliſhment of your country, you would have cunningly paſſed it by unremarked, as you were ſo conſiderable gainers by the credulity of the reſt of mankind. Had you been ſo admirably ſagacious and penetrating, as to have found out a ſafe expedient to ſet yourſelves looſe from the ties of conſcience, you would, nevertheleſs, have been glad to have held other perſons bound by the efficacious chain. Had you any ſolid claim to the ſuperiour underſtanding, which you ſo loudly boaſt of, like cunning gameſters, you would have keep the trick to yourſelves, and have reſerved the profits of your wiſdom for your

own benefit only. But if, to avoid the imputation of folly, or of a worſe motive, you pretend a principle of charity for your conduct, and aſſert, that it is mere compaſſion for the ignorance of a deluded world; that it is an honeſt warmth for the cauſe of truth, and a zeal for virtue, which render you thus ſollicitous to undeceive your fellow-creatures, and to reſcue them from the ſlavery of impoſture and ſuperſtition—we will then believe you to be ſincere in your plauſible profeſſions, when you have made it appear, that the beſt way to advance the intereſts of truth and virtue is to diſcard a religion, which, under the awe of a divine command, contains the beſt-proved, the plaineſt and moſt practicable ſyſtem of pure and refined morality; we will then believe you to be ſincere in your magnificent pretenſions, when you have propoſed another ſcheme of duty, which can more powerfully contribute to advance the happineſs of ſociety; which can render the lives of

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good men more comfortable and happy in themſelves; which can give them ſtronger aſſurances of the divine favour and acceptance, or raiſe them to more lively, and better-founded hopes of a glorious immortality, than the goſpel does. On the contrary, do not all your reaſonings and inſinuations tend to raviſh from them the idea of that bleſſed eternity in a future ſtate, which is their chief comfort and ſatisfaction, and to leave them to endleſs doubts, perplexities, and uncertainties upon the moſt important ſubjects? But, perhaps, the noble end, which you propoſe in aboliſhing Chriſtianity, is merely to deliver your deluded fellow-creatures from the conſuming terrors of that eternal miſery, which, agreeably to the doctrines of the goſpel, muſt accompany the unrepented breach of the divine laws—But whom do you expect to deliver by your arguments from theſe unneceſſary terrors, as you call them? Not the honeſt, the ſincere, and truly penitent man! for the

the goſpel ſpeaks no terrors to him; on the contrary, it gives him every aſſurance, which he can either aſk or wiſh to receive, of continual peace, comfort and happineſs. The utmoſt therefore, which you can hope from your moſt ſucceſsful labours, is to free the vicious part of mankind, thoſe who give an uninterrupted indulgence to their paſſions and perſiſt in an obſtinate courſe of wickedneſs, from the fears, which they are perpetually under, of a future puniſhment. Againſt offenders of this kind the goſpel does, indeed, denounce the moſt aweful threatnings; it condemns them to abſolute and irreverſible miſery—And can any thing be more right, fitting, equitable and uſeful, than that confeſſed rebels to the will of the ſupreme Governour of the univerſe ſhould live under the ceaſeleſs apprehenſion of being, one day, called to a ſevere account for their wilful and obſtinate tranſgreſſions of their duty. And ſmall thanks will you deſerve from the moſt thoughtful, the beſt,

beſt and moſt virtuous, part of your ſpecies for your impotent attempts to ſet ſuch perſons at liberty from terrors, ſo neceſſary to the ſupport of moral honeſty, and the advancement of the common happineſs. Surely, then, whilſt the arguments, which you uſually offer againſt the truth of the Chriſtian religion, have a manifeſt tendency to ſubvert, at the ſame time, all apprehenſions, all checks and reſtraints upon our conduct, ariſing from the belief of the immortality of the ſoul, an over-ſeeing Providence, a future ſtate of retribution, and the juſt judgements of almighty God for our crimes, you will not impute it to any want of charity in us, if, notwithſtanding the great zeal which you profeſs for the intereſts of reaſon, truth and virtue, we ſuſpect that your principal prejudice and enmity againſt Chriſtianity is, becauſe it ſets the fundamental doctrines, precepts and motives even of natural religion in too clear and ſtrong a light, which

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would, otherwiſe, be left at large, as they formerly were, to the intricate diſputes of philoſophers, and, perhaps, be regarded only as the ſplendid amuſements of the ſchools.

LXXXVII. But upon whatever motives the oppoſers of Chriſtianity may be ſuppoſed to act; whether they are inſpired by vanity, or malevolence, or a deſire of ſtilling the clamours of an uneaſy conſcience: it certainly behoveth all thoſe, who are really convinced of the divine authority of the goſpel, to endeavour to do it honour in all things. To you, therefore, do I now eſpecially addreſs myſelf, who are Chriſtians in deed, and not in appearance only: it is your duty, as you reſpect the glory of God, the credit of that name by which you are called, your own happineſs, and the welfare of ſociety, to enquire, to know, and to make uſe of the beſt and moſt effectual means to baffle the arguments of the adverſaries of your faith, and to reduce them, if poſſible, to

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a perpetual ſilence. A warm and honeſt heart, a heart full of zeal for the intereſts of religion, will be ready to reply at once, purſue and puniſh theſe baptized infidels as peſts of ſociety, and the common enemies of mankind. Let them ſeverely ſuffer, as manifeſt oppoſers of the truth, either in their pockets, or their perſons— But what will you do to lay them under a legal conviction? or how will you be able to diſtinguiſh juſtly, betwixt real and affected doubts; betwixt an impartial ſearch after truth, and malicious cavilling; between conſcientious ſcruples, and ſolemn ridicule? It is impoſſible for the wiſeſt body of written laws to reach to every kind and degree of profaneneſs and blaſphemy; and ſo ſkilful is the ſcorner become in the moſt crafty ways of communicating his ſentiments to the publick, that he is able to throw a contempt upon the eſtabliſhed religion by mere winks, hints and inſinuations; that by a pretended approbation and defence of the goſpel

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he can expoſe it to the laughter of the vicious, and the indifferent; that he can affront his Maker by quoting his own words; and, like Judas, come to Chriſt with a hail and a kiſs, at the ſame time that he is baſely intending to betray him. Are you, then, for erecting a court of juſtice for the particular trial of blaſphemy and irreligion? are you for ſetting up a high-commiſſion court, a court of judicature with full authority to receive all complaints againſt the oppugners of the eſtabliſhed religion; to enquire into the ſeries, tenour and connection of their books and diſcourſes; to examine the motives, ways and manners how the offenſive expreſſions were uttered; to conſider the antecedent characters and behaviour of the accuſed; and, at their diſcretion, to determine, whether they are guilty of profaneneſs or not? Such a method of proceeding with infidelity might, indeed, be of eſſential ſervice to the cauſe of true religion, could we be ſure of a court of invio-

inviolable integrity; could we be ſure to have men continually preſiding in it free from all danger of corruption; men upright and impartial; men of a ſound and well-informed underſtanding; men of true magnanimity, void of ſelf-intereſt, and without malice on the one hand, or miſtaken zeal on the other. But until this fundamental point can be ſecured, every perſon of candour, benevolence and experience in the hiſtory of the world, will be againſt an arbitrary and deſpotick power as well in church as ſtate, as well in religious as civil matters, under whatever amiable ſhape or form it may appear, or for whatever good purpoſes it may be piouſly intended. We have ſeen the Roman pontiffs defacing, and almoſt deſtroying, the Chriſtian inſtitution by the exerciſe of ſo exorbitant a juriſdiction over the conſciences of their brethren: and ſhould any other ſet or ſociety of men (in the preſent ſtate of human weakneſs and imperfection) be ever intruſted with ſo ex-

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tenſive an authority, we ſhall ſoon ſee them paſſing on from infidels to hereticks; from ſcoffers at the common faith to honeſt enquirers after truth; from bold blaſphemers to modeſt diſſenters. It will not be long before we feel them growing into all the cruelty of an inquiſition; and, perhaps, upon any unexpected turn of publick affairs, inſolently puniſhing what they were originally intended to protect; and branding that profeſſion of faith as ſchiſm, which it is now prophaneneſs to oppoſe. Let it be added, likewiſe, that nothing can be more repugnant to the ſpirit of genuine Chriſtianity, than for its doctrines to be either proved, or maintained, or propagated by force and violence. The religion of the mild, gentle, humble, ſelf-denying and benevolent Jeſus utterly diſclaims, and condemns, all harſh methods of proceeding, where the rights of conſcience are concerned; his goſpel needs not any ſuch ſupport, and the defenders of it (were they thoroughly acquainted with the

the ſtrength of their cauſe) might juſtly hold them in contempt.

LXXXVIII. Muſt you, then, depend altogether upon learning and argument to baffle the various wiles, and artifices of your ſubtle opponents? Here, I confeſs, our holy religion is in its full ſtrength, and our armour impregnable; nor can the evidence, which is urged in defence of the hiſtory of our faith, be overthrown without offering violence to the common ſenſe of mankind, without tearing up the very foundations, upon which all kind of credibility is built. Chriſtianity hath every thing to hope, and nothing to fear from a true freedom of thinking, from fair reaſoning and impartial enquiry. It is the peculiar honour of the goſpel, that as it was at firſt publiſhed, propagated, and made its way into every province of the Roman empire, in the moſt knowing age of all antiquity: ſo, likewiſe, when it was well-nigh loſt, and buried under the ignorance, civil revolu-

tions and barbarity of ſucceeding generations, it again raiſed its ſacred head, and recovered its native ſplendour and perfection, as literature revived, as the ſcience of nature expanded itſelf, and the art of reaſoning grew more generally known and practiſed. Sound learning and Goſpel-Chriſtianity, from their earlieſt acquaintance with each other, have never yet been ſeparated; nor will it, I truſt, be ever in the power of conceited wits, contemptuous ſcorners, or ſelf-important philoſophers, to put them aſunder. Taught, however, by experience, let us ingenuouſly confeſs, that neither ſuperiour learning nor ſuperiour argument are found the beſt and moſt effectual means to put ignorance, folly and perverſeneſs to ſilence. For as there are ſome perſons of a light, trifling, diſſipated and indolent diſpoſition, who walk by ſenſe rather than judgement, and who cannot comprehend the force of evidence, even when it appears before them in its fulleſt blaze of conviction: ſo are there

there others, again, and they not few in number, who blinded by vanity, affectation of ſingularity and a love of ſenſual pleaſures, will not attend to the admonitions of reaſon, be they ever ſo clear and certain; but are reſolved not to be convinced, whatever force of proof may be urged in oppoſition to their favourite notions, preconceived opinions, or darling appetites.

XXXIX. Behold therefore, (without having recourſe either to the aſſiſtance of the civil magiſtrate on the one hand, or depending wholly upon the aid of reaſon and literature on the other) behold! I ſhew you a more excellent, a more obvious, a more eaſy and certain way to do honour to your Chriſtian faith, to refute the malice of its adverſaries, and to recommend its doctrines to the univerſal eſteem, approbation and acceptance! Expreſs the native power, influence and perfection of the goſpel of Chriſt, in the uprightneſs and integrity of your lives: let a devout ſenſe of Gods goodneſs in his

various diſpenſations towards mankind, a decent apprehenſion of his judgements, an unaffected reverence of his holy will and commandments, a ſpirit of mutual forbearance, condeſcenſion and charity towards your fellow-creatures, and a ſincere love and admiration of virtue and religion, appear in the whole tenour of your conſiſtent behaviour, and you will effectually ſtill the raging of your bittereſt enemies, and blunt the ſharp-edged tongues of thoſe, whoſe ſatire is chiefly whetted from the diſagreement, which is ſo viſible, between the principles and practice of Chriſtians, between their arguments and their actions, between their diſcourſes and their examples. Deprive the ſcorner, therefore, of this copious ſource of objection and raillery, and he will ſoon be ſtruck dumb. Let Chriſts ſervants be unblameable in their moral and religious converſation, and his adverſaries will not have the confidence to blaſpheme. Innocence of manners, and

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an uniform integrity of life, as they are the brighteſt ornament, and ſureſt teſtimony of your own right faith in Chriſt; ſo do they render your holy profeſſion more aweful, more reputable, and more amiable in the eyes of a diſcerning world, who, moved by ſo attracting an example, will catch the ſacred ardour from you, and be more readily induced to glorify that almighty Being, who has ſhewed ſuch ſalvation unto men. Let the true ſpirit and diſpoſition of your great Maſter and Saviour ſhine before men in your unaffected practice of piety, temperance and univerſal benevolence; cheriſh in yourſelves, and heartily cultivate thoſe graces, which are the genuine offspring of a well-informed belief of Jeſus and his doctrines, and you will have no occaſion to apprehend the decay of Chriſtianity, or the downfal of the church. Do you but ſincerely renounce the works of ſin, and neither the force nor cunning,

ning, neither the arguments nor the malice of the wicked ſhall ever prevail againſt the common faith. *For ſo is the will of God, that with well-doing you put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.*



The E N D.